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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"AMHERST SHOT!" HE EXCLAIMED, RUSHING TO THE SPOT WHERE THE WOUNDED MAN LAY.

JACK AMHERST, HERO.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was only a little village in —shire, with a cluster of cottages nestling in a valley between two hills, from which the homes of the richer inhabitants, and here and there a farmer's dwelling, looked down on those of their fellow-creatures, who knew no more of the luxuries of life, further than that they had to toil from morn to night for a small pittance, that their more favoured brethren might enjoy them. And yet, if the truth were known, there was greater happiness in their humble dwellings than within the walls of those more pretentious ones.

At a short distance beyond stood the village church, with its ancient porch all run over with green ivy, clinging around it and extending to the steeple with its turreted tower; where the

jackdaws built their nests, never frightened by the sound of the bells which rang out each Sunday; and at times more joyous still when a wedding took place, or when its solemn toll spoke of another grave to be added to those already nearly filling the quiet churchyard.

On the other side was the river, a large, winding, silvery stream, with high rushes, which the children would weave into miniature baskets, growing each side, and forming a shelter for the swans from the mid-day sun; whilst they sailed majestically on its rippling waves, in places where the soft green lawn of their owners came sloping down to the water's edge.

Barges, or coal-wherries, as they were called there, were the chief craft passing up and down, more than one yacht being rarely seen on its surface; and that one belonging, of all persons, to the Reverend Nathaniel Wardrop, who was much more at home on board, his white hands taking in the reefs of a sail, than he was in the pulpit discouraging a sermon.

The sea had been his ambition from boyhood,

but it had been denied him; for an uncle who had the living at Northwick in his gift, decided to present it to this, his youngest and favourite nephew, to the mortification of Nathaniel himself, who groaned in his spirit when he heard of his uncle's generosity, that doomed him to the quiet, uneventful life against which his spirit rebelled.

But no other course was open to him, so he took holy orders; and in due time came to Northwick as its rector. There was only one thing which in any way reconciled him to his fate. It was a rich living, out of which he could keep a curate to do the work of the parish; and provided he preached once a week to a scanty congregation, he considered he had done all that was required of him.

His eyes glistened with pleasure when he first feasted them on the blue water flowing so near to where the Rectory stood, it passing in his mind at once how he could in some way compensate himself for being thus placed in a position so at variance with his inclination.

So leaving the school, the choir, the sick, and the dying to the care of his underpaid curate, Nathaniel at once set about purchasing a yacht (for it was lovely summer weather) which had been advertised for sale, his head so filled with jib-booms and mainsails that it was with difficulty he could collect his thoughts sufficiently to perform his weekly task of copying the sermon of some eminent divine, and placing it carefully in the black case made to receive it.

The Rectory certainly was dull to a man still young, of Nathaniel's temperament, notwithstanding its pretty sloping lawn and full-leaved beeches, spreading their branches almost to its surface; and he shuddered when he considered what it would be in the winter when the trees would be bare, his beloved yacht with her white sails furled away in the boat-house; and he shut up with no society but that of old Mrs. Brand, his housekeeper, and the young curate, whose face itself spake of nothing but death and judgment.

However, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, he inwardly commented, whilst making preparations for a short cruise, the while he gave instructions to Mr. Farrell to order whatever he thought necessary from the Rectory larder for the sick in the parish, not to forget the wedding which was to be solemnized the following Monday, and the funeral of old Sykes, the blacksmith, fixed to take place the day after; and then, with his portmanteau and sketch-book, he started.

There were many places of interest in the neighbourhood to which he did justice, and with the yacht—like a thing of life scudding the silvery water with its tiny ripples, the blue heavens above reflected therein—Nathaniel forgot all in his full enjoyment of the present.

His crew consisted of a man and boy, from whom he gained all that was to be known of the country through which the blue river twisted and turned; when, as was often the case, they would lay at anchor while he sketched such and such a spot, with the white sails flapping lazily in the summer air, and the waves gurgling under her bows.

"That, sir, that be the seat of Sir Henry Muscaver," was the man's reply, in answer to his inquiry respecting a large red-bricked mansion just peeping from between the trees which bordered down almost to the river itself. "It's a gloomy looking place enough, for since the death of her ladyship, Sir Henry has led the life of a hermit—never seen—no company, they say, and never stirrin' out beyond his own grounds."

"Was he very fond of his wife, then?" he asked.

"They say he just worshipped her," the man answered; "an' altho' Miss Nesta is now eighteen year-old, her father scarce ever sees her, and they livin' in the same house all the while."

"Why, what was his reason? One would have thought he would have been devoted to the child for the sake of the mother," Nathaniel said, the while he was making preparations to sketch the Priory, the name he was told given to Sir Henry's place.

"Far from that, sir," was the reply, "looking on the infant cause like o' her mother's death, he declared he'd never look on its face. No more he did, so they say, for years. She had governesses, masters, an' all the like o' that; but knows no more o' her father than a stranger most."

"His wife's death must have turned his brain, I should think," was Nathaniel's answer; but further than that the subject was not continued, his attention being attracted to a rowing-boat, which was being steered as though with the full intention of running her into the *Mermaid*, as the yacht was called.

"Look out there! where're ya coming to?" the man shouted, but too late, for before he could push her off she had come into collision with the little vessel, the shock almost causing the smaller one to be upset, had not the young clergyman and his crew rushed to their assistance.

"All your fault, Nesta! I told you how it would be."

Then, turning to Nathaniel,—

"I am awfully sorry," her companion continued, "but my cousin here prides herself on her navigation, and had it not been for your timely aid an impromptu bath at least, if not a watery grave, would have been the result."

"It is too bad, Dick," the girl answered, turning from him and raising her eyes filled with tears to Nathaniel. "Don't believe him, please, he kept teasing me the whole way, first telling me to pull one string and then the other, until I got confused, and pulled the wrong one."

"Well, it might have been worse," Nathaniel answered, holding out his hand. "Allow me to assist you on board, for you see your little boat is half-filled already with water," when with a spring she was soon on the deck of the *Mermaid*, followed by Dick, whilst the boy received orders to bale her out.

"It is very, very kind!" Nesta said, who had by this time recovered her composure, whilst her cousin was dolefully looking down on his wet boots, and repenting himself of the folly he had committed.

"I don't know what Mademoiselle will say," she continued, totally disregarding his discomfiture, and raising her eyes pleadingly to the young Rector, who had led them to the cabin below, where he supplied them with refreshments.

"That is her French governess, a she-dragon, I call her," Dick explained, "who will inflict all kinds of impositions on her," and he jerked his head in the direction of his cousin, "for coming with me on the water, unless—" and then he stopped.

"Unless what?" Nathaniel asked.

"You would let your man return and invite her to join us here."

"And you think that would conciliate her?" he laughed.

"Oh, yes, if you would only make up some story that it was your fault; that we were walking by the edge, when Nesta slipped, and you saved her from falling into the river, and all that, when she would become *ravissante*, and you charming," and the boy shrugged his shoulders in his mimicry of what the Frenchwoman would do.

"You see, we ran away when she had fallen asleep over a novel she was reading, under the beach tree," Nesta added, looking up at Nathaniel with frightened eyes.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I will do all I can for you, if you will only tell me who you are, and where Mademoiselle is to be found."

"Oh! how stupid I!" she rejoined, blushing. "I quite forgot! I am Nesta Muscaver, and papa lives in that red house yonder, you can just see through the trees," and she was about to advance from the cabin to show him where, when her eyes fell on an open sketch-book, the first picture presenting itself—that of her own home.

"Why you have been drawing it in chalks!" she cried, delightedly. "Do let me show it to Dick!"

"I have been making a few sketches up the river," he added, blushing almost as much as the girl herself; "but before staying to look at them kindly give my man directions where Mademoiselle is likely to be found, for although I do not wish to hurry you I do not think it advisable to remain longer than you can help in your wet clothes," but as her cousin volunteered to accompany him, further directions were unnecessary, and Nesta returned to the drawings, as the ears of the rowers splashed in the water.

CHAPTER II.

"I CANNOT remember where, but it seems to me your face is familiar to me, Miss Muscaver!" Nathaniel said, when, with the exception of the boy who was engaged ast, they were alone on the *Mermaid* awaiting Mademoiselle's arrival; "but when once seen, it is not a face likely to be forgotten."

"No!" she replied, questioningly; "but don't you live at Northwick?"
"I do," he answered; "being incumbent of that parish."

"Ah! then I remember," she said. "You saw me when the church was re-opened after its restoration, and the new organ pealed through its aisles. You know we are but five miles away, and Northwick church is the oldest within twenty. It was built in the time of one of the Edwards, I believe."

But Nathaniel gave no heed to the century in which the first stone of the holy edifice was laid; he was thinking of a girlish figure which at the time had attracted his attention, and a pair of blue eyes which had haunted him for many days after.

"Then we are quite old friends!" he said, laughing, while she let her hand dip over the side where they were seated into the water, a puff of wind catching her hair and tossing it like a shower of gold into his face.

"You are quite sure you don't feel cold?" he asked.

"Oh! no," she said, "not a bit; and my feet are nearly dry now." And then they turned to see the boat returning with the little French lady in the stern.

"Oh! ma chérie, it was every ware dat I have looked for you," she said, when after being introduced to Nathaniel, she embraced her pupil, Dick the while mimicking her from behind. "Sir Henry has requested me to ask you to favour us with your company at dinner," she went on in her broken English, addressing herself to Nathaniel.

At first he thought to have declined the invitation, and he had almost said so in words, when a something in Nesta's blue eyes made him stirr his determination.

"I shall be most happy," he said, when Mademoiselle declaring Nesta would catch her death if she did not quickly return to change her clothes, the clergyman gave orders to weigh-anchor, and the *Mermaid* sailed to where the emerald green of the Priory grounds extended to the river's brink; while Sir Henry, who had watched their arrival from the garden-terrace, advanced to meet them as they approached, the Frenchwoman introducing their guest.

But Nesta had stolen gently forward until she reached where her father stood, when looking up, half frightened, to his stern, cold face, and laying her hand on his arm,—

"You are not very cross, papa, dear?" she asked.

"We will speak about that by-and-by Nesta," he answered, twitching himself away from her, and turning to Nathaniel.

"I am delighted to see you, Mr. Wardroper," and he extended his hand, whilst he expressed his thanks for the services he had rendered his daughter.

"Dick ought to be ashamed of himself, taking her out on the water, neither of them knowing any more about a boat than a boat knows about them," he said. "But out of evil comes good, for had it not been for this little episode I might never have had the pleasure of making your acquaintance; but there goes the first gong, so make haste, girls, and get indoors; and I will lead you to my dressing-room, Mr. Wardroper, for I assure you I have a cook who is punctual to the moment, and would go into hysterics should the fish be kept waiting a second beyond the time."

The girls, signifying Nesta and the Frenchwoman, had already entered, followed by Dick, who nearly exploded, as he told his cousin after, at the idea of the governor speaking of Mademoiselle as one like herself, whilst she rebuked him in her quiet way for his ever making game of her governess.

"I am afraid your father was annoyed with you?" Nathaniel said to the girl after, when they were in the drawing-room awaiting the signal for dinner.

"Oh, it's only papa's way," she answered, a sad light coming into her soft eyes; "for you see, unfortunately, my coming into the world was the cause of my mother leaving it, he has

never forgiven me for the trouble I thus innocently brought on him."

"But, surely, it is so many years since that he does not allow that to influence his conduct towards you now?" he said.

"Papa never forgets," she answered, when the gong again sounded, and the Baronet making his appearance, all further conversation between them ceased, it drifting into the usual dinner-table talk.

But it was late before the Rector returned to his yacht, and the grounds around the Priory were bathed in the moonlight when he crossed them to where she was lying to, no persuasions on the part of his host prevailing on him to pass the night on shore.

The man and boy were fast asleep when he came on board, after bidding adieu to Dick, who insisted on accompanying him to the water's edge; but it was long before he could bring himself to seek repose within the little cabin, remaining on deck, smoking a cigar, his thoughts awhile running to Nesta, her blue eyes haunting him as they did on that day when he first saw her in Northwick church.

All seemed so peaceful around, the moonbeams resting on lawn and tree, making it appear light as day; while a solitary bat would at times fly by, and with the whirr of its wings disturb the stillness.

"What an idiot the man must be!" he said, to himself, as his mind reverted to Sir Henry's dislike to his beautiful daughter. "Poor little girl, it's hard lines, and no mistake; and after eighteen years too! It seems incredible that a man could be such a fool!" and then throwing away the end of his cigar he went below.

The next morning was bright and clear, as those had been before it; and the little crew on board the *Mermaid* were astir betimes; Nathaniel arousing himself from his sleep, in which he had dreamt of only Nesta, to drink in the pure soft air which came from over the hills in the distance.

"We'll lay to here for to-day, Thompson," he said to the man; "for there are one or two spots I am anxious to sketch."

So after the morning meal had been prepared and disposed of, Nathaniel took his drawing materials, leaving the others in charge of the little craft, and to lave away the hours as they thought best. There were the ruins of an old abbey in the neighbourhood, which would make a good subject for his pencil, he considered. They were not far distant, so he made up his mind to resort thither.

Children were there before him, and for some time, whilst selecting his chalks, he sat watching them, as they would climb on the decayed walls and then jump down at the peril of life and limb; but the noonday sun was rising high in the heavens, and soon it would be too warm with no shelter to remain there with its rays pouring down on his devoted head; and he was about to commence when a large Newfoundland dog came bounding towards him, upsetting his arrangements in a most unsatisfactory fashion.

"Come here, you bad dog!"

He turned to the words fell on his ear, and Miss Musgrave followed in the animal's footsteps.

"Oh! Mr. Wardroper, I am so sorry!" she said, extending her hand. "I hope he has not done much mischief."

"Nothing very serious," he replied, stooping to recover his colour, and to hide the blush, which, like a girl's, had risen to his forehead. "I trust you are none the worse for your adventure of yesterday, Miss Nesta?"

"Oh, dear, no!" she answered, smiling. "And so you are going to sketch our old abbey? Do let me see it when it is finished."

"Not only that," he returned, "but should the copy prove worthy of your acceptance I shall be only too pleased to present you with one. But what have you done with your bodyguard? or have you ventured out with your dog alone as escort?"

"Oh, Cesar and I take many a stroll together, don't we, old fellow?" she said, patting the dog's head, he looking up the while, half jealous that a stranger should share her smiles. "You see Dick

is studying for his exam; he is going to be a doctor, you know, so had to return to London, starting very early this morning, while poor Mademoiselle cannot endure the heat—I mean to move about in."

"And Sir Henry, doesn't he like it either?" asked Nathaniel.

A shade of sadness for a moment passed over her face, but the next it was gone.

"Papa has letters to write," she said, and then they talked on other topics, and she imperceptibly entwining herself around his heart, until he felt that something other than chance had thrown them together.

What a loveless life her few years of existence must have been, he thought, and she so lovable left but to the care of paid servants and this Frenchwoman, with no feeling in sympathy with her own; and it was then that the desire to take her to his bosom, to give her his name, his protection, his love, grew so strong within him in the days that followed that he felt he could no longer meet her in the old way without declaring his passion, and knowing the fate which awaited him.

It was a fortnight now since her collision with the *Mermaid*, and still the little vessel lay anchored at the foot of the Priory woods, only spreading her white sails when Sir Henry and his daughter, accompanied by Mademoiselle, were on board. Nathaniel would take them on some excursion up the river not returning till evening, when they would all adjourn to the Priory itself.

But Northwick was requiring his presence now, the time for his absence having expired, and he knew that Mr. Farrell would become weary of the double duty devolving on him.

"This has been the happiest day I have ever known, and yet it is the saddest!" he said to Nesta, as together they sat by the open window in the drawing-room.

They had plied amid the ruins of the old abbey, not until the cool of the evening returning to a late dinner. But they did but little justice to the meal, and now that even was over, Sir Henry was taking his accustomed nap, while the little Frenchwoman had begged, on the ground of fatigue, to be excused, leaving Nesta, and Nathaniel alone, sufficiently awake to carry on a conversation, their eyes wandering as though fearful of meeting the glance of each, to the woods beyond, now becoming darkened in the growing gloom.

"And why the saddest?" she asked, toying with the crimson tassel of the blind.

"Because it may be the last I shall ever spend with you!" he answered. "I wonder if you will miss me as I shall miss you, Nesta," he went on, coming so near until his hand rested on her soft, fair hair; and then as she did not answer, "Is there anything very intricate in the workmanship of that tassel?" he asked.

She looked up then, smiling, her eyes wet with hushed tears, whilst the tassel fell from her hands, to go bumping backwards and forwards against the window-pane.

"I was thinking how dull I should be when you are gone," she said. "They have been such pleasant days, these of the last fortnight!"

"Then you won't quite forget me!"

His dark eyes had met hers then, as with one hand in each of his he stood awaiting her reply.

"Indeed—indeed, I never shall," she returned, a dry sob she could not control ending in the emotion she was unable to hide further.

The next moment she was in his arms, her head with its wealth of yellow hair resting on his broad shoulder, and he telling her how dear she had become to him in those summer days passing but too quickly away.

CHAPTER III.

SIR HENRY readily gave his consent to his daughter's engagement; in fact, further than the knowledge that he was a gentleman, and in a position to keep her in the style to which she was accustomed, he took but little interest as to who her future husband might be.

"You don't think Mr. Wardroper too old?" Mademoiselle asked him, who in her romantic ideas with regard to Nesta could not associate Nathaniel's five-and-thirty years with her beau-ideal of the lover she had pictured for her *charante demoiselle*.

"Too old! Rabbish," was the Baronet's curt reply. "Far better thus than a boy who has yet his wild oats to sow, and doesn't know his own mind."

So it was settled that Nesta was shortly to become Mrs. Wardroper, and Nathaniel returned to Northwick happy in his choice—an engaged man.

Mr. Farrell was not sorry to see his Rector back again; the parishioners had apparently taken advantage of his absence to fall sick, extra work thus devolving upon him, who with the double service on Sundays, and an unusual number of funerals during the week, found he had not a moment he could call his own.

But to Nathaniel it all appeared very lissome, this parish business, when his head was full of nothing but Nesta, pretty Nesta, when like a gleam of sunshine in a cloudy sky, her letters would come, dispersing the gloom, and he would visit his people with a bright and happy face.

Sir Henry gave him many an invitation to the Priory, feeling that it was incumbent on him to study the degree of character of his future son-in-law, Nesta ever looking forward to these visits, as days to be chronicled in those to come, as the happiest in her recollection.

It was thus the summer passed away, those few fine miles which lay between Northwick Rectory and the Baronet's estate proving but little obstacle to the lovers seeing much of each other.

It was now the end of August, the yellow corn, gathered into sheaves, standing in knots over the fields, where it had so lately waved in its golden beauty; and even now the days were beginning to close in early, while the partridges, in the enjoyment of their lives so speedily to be ended, would run in and out amid the stubble. Nathaniel and his betrothed had had several excursions in the *Mermaid*, Mademoiselle acting as chaperone, and invariably falling asleep beneath the influence of sun and water, when the lovers would in undertones speak of the happy future in store for them.

The wedding was fixed for the first week in November—a month hence—during which time Nesta would frequently visit the town of Merton, near to which the Priory stood, and where all but such dresses as were ordered from London that was necessary for the trousseau could be easily obtained.

"My darling is quite sure she will never repeat!" he asked, one day, when on one of those occasions he had accompanied her. "The wife of a country Rector can have but little gaiety. You do not think you will weary of a life thus spent? Day after day much the same!"

"What a droll idea, Nat!" she replied, raising her blue eyes lovingly to his. "Away from the hills and the trees, the fields and the river I should be miserable; and then, dear, have I not you?"

"But you have seen so little of the world, Nesta!" he went on, "so little of life, and I am so much the older than you are, dear, that supposing you should come across some other more your own age, and you were to feel, as perhaps you might do, that you had mistaken friendship for love, that you had sacrificed your youth, discovering, when it was too late, how you had deceived yourself even."

"I shall think you are the one who is repenting, Nat!" she said, in an injured tone.

But no sooner had the words left her lips than they were recalled, for in the eyes which met hers was such a wealth of love and tenderness that she could not mistake.

"Oh! Nat, dear, forgive me!" she asked, looking pleadingly into his face, and then both turned to see advancing towards them Dick, and with him a young man but a few years his senior.

"Hallo, Nesta!" he said, grasping her hand, and bowing to Nathaniel. "Mademoiselle told me I should be sure to come across you here!"

"Captain Amherst, my cousin—the Rev. Wardroper, Captain Amherst."

The Captain bowed in acknowledgment, Nesta while blushing to her temples as she held out a tiny gloved hand to her cousin's friend.

"Have you seen papa?" she asked of Dick. "We did not expect you till the twenty-third. Have you passed?"

"My exam, Nesta! No, worse luck, and in order to overcome the disgrace and mortification consequent thereon, took my friend's advice here (signifying the Captain) to run down to the Priory for a time."

"But papa?" she repeated.

"Oh! yes, I've seen him," he answered. "He's all right, more grieved than angry; but I'm sure it wasn't for the want of study that I didn't pull through, was it, Jack?"

Dick replied he was quite sure of that; but Nathaniel, who was silently taking note of what passed, fancied he could detect a smile pass over the features of the Captain, his eyes scarcely agreeing to the truth of what he asserted.

He was tall and well-built, his face brown from exposure to the sun and the sea air, coming recently, as he explained to Nesta, from Dover, where he had been staying with an old friend stationed there, and then they walked on a little in front, while Nathaniel, behind with Dick, heard him talking to her in his fascinating, winning way, his heart throbbing as it did with the first pang of jealousy.

"My uncle has told me all about it, and I am so glad," Dick was saying, referring to his engagement to his cousin, and then he went on speaking of his own disappointment, to all of which he received only curt replies, Nathaniel the while thinking but of those two before them, with a strange fear, like a presentiment of evil, filling his mind.

"Have you known Captain Amherst long?" he asked of Dick, who had been enquiring his new friend to the skies.

"Well, not long," the youth answered; "but he is no end of a good fellow; always ready to help one when he is hard up, you know, and all that sort of thing."

But what that sort of thing was meant to imply Nathaniel had to leave to his imagination, for they had now arrived at the Priory gates, when excusing himself on the ground that his presence was required at Northwick to attend a meeting in the schoolroom that evening, he bade them adieu.

"Why are you running away, Nat, I thought you were going to spend the evening with us?"

He turned as the gentle voice recalled him to himself.

"What made you care about me, Nesta?" he answered, facing the girl, who had left the others. "I'm sorry to take you from your new friend, See, they are waiting; don't let me detain you."

"Are you not well, dear?" she asked, looking wistfully at him, for he was so strange, so altered in those few moments, that she could not understand.

"Not very," he replied, and then their hands met; he pressed a kiss on her forehead, and the next moment she was alone.

It was some days after that before Nathaniel again visited the Priory, during which the Captain had not been idle, having so ingratiated himself with the old Baronet that he half forgave Dick the disgrace he had brought on himself for the pleasant society Captain Amherst's presence afforded him; whilst Nesta's eyes would glisten more than was their wont whenever that gentleman sought her presence, Nathaniel alone harbouring a feeling of dislike towards him.

"An insufferable puppy," he would say to Nesta; "boring everyone with his army talk and mess-room anecdotes"—an accusation which would make the girl look up in surprise, a glance of fun the while escaping from beneath her long lashes, for that, of all things, was what Jack Amherst most avoided, no one having the power to bring him out on the subject.

"I can't make the fellow out," Sir Henry had said, on one occasion; "he evidently is a gentleman, and yet—" and then he paused as if in doubt, and not wishing to express what was really

in his thoughts, thus creating a suspicion in the mind of Nathaniel which never existed there before, and made him determine to question Dick respecting his new friend.

"I trust you won't be offended," he said, a few days after, when an opportunity offered, "but would you mind telling me where you came across Captain Amherst?"

They were walking on the terrace in front of the Priory, on to which the windows of the lower rooms opened. It was after dinner, Sir Henry enjoying his nap, the while Mademoiselle was so absorbed in a novel that she paid little heed to the song, which, at the request of the Captain, Nesta was warbling at the piano, and he turning her music, a sight which made Nathaniel's heart to throb with jealous rage, and the cigar he had been smoking to drop from his fingers.

It was a moment or so before Dick answered, the colour flying to his temples like a girl's; but on Nathaniel repeating his question,—

"Well, we got into a row one night at the Ori, some other students and myself, when I was being handled pretty roughly by the police; and had it not been for Jack, who came on the scene, should most probably have spent the night in the police-station," he answered.

"In fact, you mean to say he rescued you," Nathaniel said, in a tone so quiet that his companion felt it was useless to deny the fact.

"That was it," he replied, "and ever since we have been the best of friends."

"I no longer wonder that you did not pass your examination," Nathaniel continued. "And this is all you know of the man you have introduced into your uncle's house—to your cousin!—a man accidentally met in a disgraceful brawl, a sciolistic officer, late in her Majesty's service, who shrinks from the mention of his antecedents, and has never named the family to which he is supposed to belong!"

He had become so excited, he usually so calm; his voice rising until it was heard above the tones of the girl's song coming from within; and then, as he turned, he saw that which made his heart to stand still, his very pulse to cease beating.

The days closed in so early now, and the lamps had been already lighted in the drawing-room, where Nesta was seated by the piano. The song she had been singing had that moment ended, but as yet she had not risen from her seat, when unconscious that their every action was visible to those without, she raised her eyes in answer to some words whispered in her ears by the Captain, as he leaned admiringly over her shoulder. A moment later, and she was on her feet, her hand in his, and he bending low, until his moustache swept her smooth, white forehead.

And Nathaniel gazed on the scene before him, the girl with that look on her face he could not mistake, and he, the serpent which had entered into his paradise, pouring such words into her ears as he had thought no man but he would utter.

He could not speak, a sound like a groan escaping his breath, whilst in the agony of that moment he clutched the arm of the youth by his side like in a grip of iron and then his manhood recalled him to himself.

"I cannot stay to say good-night," he gasped. "Excuse me to Sir Henry, and—your cousin." He would have said Nesta, but the name he so madly loved stuck in his throat, when muttering something about a parochial engagement which had escaped his memory, and for which he would be already late, he bade him a hasty good-night, and a moment after he was gone, Dick the while standing bewildered as he watched his retreating figure across the lawn, so clear in the moonlight, until it was lost in the copse beyond, the silver waters of the river alone reflecting the wild features on its blue surface of a man who, in the agony of his soul, had even thought to find rest in its silent bed.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. FARRELL was awaiting him on his return, starting when his Rector entered the room where he was seated, his face so drawn and haggard, his

whole frame quivering with an excitement so foreign to his nature.

"I am afraid you are not well, sir?" he said, rising and placing a chair ready for him.

"Well!" the other replied, "never better in my life! Why, what should make you think otherwise?" when advancing to the sideboard he poured out a glass of brandy, tossing it off at one draught. "Ah! you have got a fire, I see," he continued. "Glad of that; for it is quite chilly out," and then seating himself he rubbed his hands over the blaze, while a laugh not nice to hear broke from his lips. "Any news to-night?" he said, after a few moments during which the curate was considering in his mind what it could be which made him so strange.

"Not much," was the reply, whilst handing him the paper. "The police hope they have a clue to the thieves in that great diamond robbery, they say."

"Oh, yes, the diamond robbery!" Nathaniel answered, his eyes fixed on the burning coal. "I almost forgot about it."

"It happened about three months ago, if you remember, at Lerton Park. The family were at dinner, when the lady's maid, entering her ladyship's room, found the window wide open, a ladder thrown to the ground underneath, and my lady's jewel case, containing diamonds to the value of twenty thousand pounds, gone!"

"Ah! I recollect," the Rector answered.

"The detectives were called in, and came to the conclusion, from certain signs they discovered, that there had been no entry through the window at all."

"That, in fact, the thief, whoever he was, was in the house."

"Just so," Nathaniel answered, but his tons was so dreamy, his mind apparently so preoccupied, that he soon lapsed into silence, and Mr. Farrell, after a few moments, rose, saying it was late, and bid him good-night.

Once alone the restraint he had put on his feelings gave way, as in his imagination he again saw that scene in the Priory drawing-room being enacted; but the bitter spirit he first evinced towards the girl who could so quickly forsake him for a new love was soon passed, whilst he blamed himself for claiming her affections, untried as they were by intercourse with the outer world.

Nor did his anger long burn against Jack; maybe he never knew that her faith was pledged to him, he reflected; and could he be so unjust as to jump to the conclusion that he had intentionally robbed him of all that made life worth living.

No, he would give her back her liberty, and if he proved himself but worthy of her love, he would not repine. He would never marry. The voices of his children should never be heard within those walls; but he should outlive, doubtless, the pain which was now racking his very soul. A few more years, and the best of his life would be past, and maybe then, when he was an old man, they would meet each other as friends, and he would smile at the agony he was enduring now.

It was thus Nathaniel soliloquised, his head resting on his hand, and his eyes fixed on the dying coals which would crack with each expiring breath, and then, with a sudden resolve to rouse himself from his apathy, he moved towards a writing-table close by, the room with every object in it whirling round in a giddy dance as he re-seated himself by it, spreading carefully before him the sheet on which he was to give the death-blow to all his hopes, Nesta's face in all its beauty and innocence rising before him at each stroke of the pen.

At times he would feel he could not give her up, and then he would tear the paper into a thousand pieces, when his mind returning to that evening but a few hours since, when he had seen her raise her eyes so full of love to the face of Jack Amherst, he felt he had but one course left him to pursue—to restore to her the freedom she could not do otherwise than desire.

"My darling, my darling!" he wrote, "I know all, and give you back your pledge. I do not blame you, Nesta, and even feel kindlier to him now than when at first it broke upon me

that he had stolen my love from me. It was presumption on my part from the beginning, dear, to think that you could care for me; but I was selfish in the intensity of my great love for you, and I thought how you would come to love me in return—”

It was then the pen fell from his hand, whilst from each nook and corner in that lonely room gazing figures would seem to mock him in his misery, Jack Amherst in their midst dragging Nesta from him, and she holding out her hands imploringly for him to save her. He felt his limbs growing stiff and cold, yet he was powerless to resist the force which chained him to the spot, whilst his head drooped—drooped until, with a heavy thud, it fell on the unfinished page.

An hour later, and the household was aroused, for Mr. Farrell, having had occasion to return for a book he had required, had discovered his rector, the veins on his forehead swollen till they stood out like thick cords purple and black, his breath coming from him in hard, laboured gasps.

“Any unusual excitement or worry?” the doctor asked, who had been speedily summoned, after his orders that he should be undressed and hastily put to bed had been obeyed.

“I know of nothing,” the Curate replied, for the unfinished letter, penned in the agony of his soul, had been removed by him, that all should not learn the secret which had failed him like a mighty oak in his manly strength.

“Not subject to fits?” the other questioned, lifting the white heavy lids from his patient’s eyes.

“I never knew him to have one before, sir,” Mrs. Bland answered, for she had been hastily aroused to attend her master.

“Well, let him have the mixture I shall send as soon as possible; he is nearly recovered now, but must be kept very quiet, or he may have a return of the symptoms, and he had better not be left to-night.”

But it was James Farrell who volunteered to watch by the sick-bed, dismissing the house-keeper, notwithstanding her many protestations to the contrary, as soon as the necessary dose had been administered.

Nathaniel had endeared himself to the young man in a way not uncommon to any with whom he came in contact; and those few lines, telling him, as they did, the agony of mind through which he had passed, made him to guard the secret of his illness from the curiosity of servants; so under the pretence that Mrs. Bland would be fatigued for her duties on the ensuing day, he persisted in taking up his position by the Rector’s side.

After a while his breathing became less laborious, and he at last fell into a gentle sleep, only by a muttered sentence now and then letting the man by his side know of the channel in which his mind unconsciously ran.

“You here, Farrell?”

He had opened his eyes now, while the grey streaks of the early morning discovered to him the curate, his pale face telling of the night-watch he had been keeping by his side.

“Yes, sir. You were ill last night,” was the reply. “But now that you are better, after giving you your medicine, I will go to bed. There is plenty of time yet for a few hours’ sleep.”

Nathaniel took the glass held towards him, a confused remembrance of the events of the preceding evening coming to his recollection, with a sense of weariness he could not realist.

“You are very good!” he said; and then he sank back on the pillow, his eyes involuntarily closing the while.

But when the doctor called later on he found his patient up, declaring he felt quite himself, with the exception of a little weakness due to the attack of the preceding evening.

He was seated on a couch drawn up to the open window, within which the warm bright rays of the October sun entered, his eyes resting dreamily on the lawn and gravel drive strown over with dead leaves, red and yellow, tossed hither and thither by the autumn wind, his own dream of life now dead as they.

“I shall be all right now, doctor!” he was saying, and turned to shake his extended hand, when he became aware of the sound of horses’ hoofs approaching up the carriage-way, and was not a little surprised to see Dick alight in haste at the hall-door.

For the moment all thought but of Nesta passed from his mind. Could she be ill—had an accident befallen her? was the fear which on the instant took possession of his brain, when, dismissing the doctor with a hasty politeness, he prepared himself to receive his other visitor.

“I trust there is nothing amiss?” he asked, anxiously, whilst taking Dick’s hand.

“Well, not much,” was the lad’s reply; “but had it not been for Jack Amherst, I cannot tell what might have occurred. The Priory was broken into last night, the plate in every-day use was stolen, five hundred pounds taken from the iron safe in my uncle’s bedroom; and but for the fact that Jack, whose room is in close proximity to his own, hearing him calling for help, he would have been murdered in his bed.”

“And your cousin?” Nathaniel asked, his thoughts at once resting on Nesta.

“Did not entirely escape,” Dick answered, “for the diamond ornaments she wore last night have disappeared from where she placed them on her dressing-table.”

“And were not the servants, any of them, aroused?”

“No. That is the strange part of the business,” Dick replied; “for although there is no doubt but that the thieves effected an entrance close to where their apartments are situated, they all declare they never heard a sound until Captain Amherst aroused the whole household, and then there was no sign of the robbers to be seen, they evidently having made good their escape during the confusion that ensued; and as they had taken the precaution in the first instance to cut the old-fashioned bell-ropes hanging each side of my uncle’s bed, there was no way of communicating with the household otherwise than calling, which Jack did most lustily. But come over as soon as you can, old fellow, for the old gentleman’s nerves are terribly shaken, and I must get back directly, a messenger having been despatched to Mirtleborough for the police.”

And so, later on, Nathaniel again found himself beneath the roof of the Priory, and the resolution he had formed but a few hours since—never again to enter within its walls—broken!

He was still pale, very pale, the attack he had had on the previous evening leaving him weak and feeble; but when Nesta came forward to meet him, placing her soft white hands within his whilst she told him how grieved she was to hear of his illness, all but the great love which made him a coward in her presence was forgotten.

He blamed himself, his foolish jealousy, his mad temper; but not one unkind thought crossed his mind with regard to the girl who now looked up to him with those wondrous blue eyes, whose truth he felt he could never again doubt.

It was then that the handle of the door turned, and Sir Henry entered, leaning on the arm of the Captain, and it was with difficulty he could command himself sufficiently to offer his congratulations to the Baronet on his escape.

At the sight of Jack, the scene which was enacted in the drawing-room on the previous evening revolved itself before him, acting with double force on his imagination, and making him to reel like a drunken man, as he advanced to grasp Sir Henry’s extended hand.

“So you have been ill, Wardroper!” he said, “my nephew tells me. I hope you are alright now. I am a bit shaken, nerves not so strong as they used to be, you know, or I should have been even with those fellows last night, instead of being so thoroughly at their mercy that had it not been for my young friend here, and he turned to Jack Amherst, ‘you would most likely have said good-bye to me for the last time when we parted then.’ ”

“I am very thankful you escaped, Sir Henry; but do you think you would be able to recog-

nise your assailants in the event of their being captured?”

It was all Nathaniel could stammer out, while the Captain was leading his host to a seat near the window, where Nesta had arranged the cushions for his comfort.

“I can’t say I could,” was the reply; “and it being so I think it but useless trouble calling in the police, who will, after all, leave about as wise as they came. That’s your opinion Captain, isn’t it?” and he appealed to Jack, who, in an undertone, was relating to Nesta how it was that he was first awakened, and that in his anxiety for the safety of her father he never gave a thought to the identity of the burglars.

A few moments after a servant entered, followed by Dick, to say that the detectives had arrived, and would like to go over the house.

“Hadn’t you better accompany them my boy?” Sir Henry asked, addressing the Captain, who appeared too engrossed with Nesta to heed the interruption; not until he had repeated the same agreeing that he should be most happy if Sir Henry would join them, and state what occurred.

“I’ll do that,” was the Baronet’s rejoinder, “provided you allow me the assistance of your arm, for Dick has already disappeared,” on which the Captain declared he should be delighted.

“We hope to return with some good news!” he smiled, looking back on Nesta, and then the door closed on them, leaving her and Nathaniel sole occupants of the Priory drawing-room.

For some moments they were both silent, each apparently aware that the shadow which had come over their love-dream still rested between them and the true happiness which but a few weeks since they had thought was perfect.

“Have you no word for me, Nesta?”

It was Nathaniel who had risen from his seat, advancing to where the girl stood, looking out on the woods beyond, and the silver streak of the blue river visible between, her thoughts wandering to that day on which they crossed each other’s path.

She was toying with the blind tassel as she had done than when she had promised to become his bride. And now it was all changed, and at the sound of his voice the tassel fell from her hands, whilst the warm blood rushed to her temples, dyeing them in a deep carnation hue.

“Don’t start, don’t turn from me, Nesta!” he said, coming so near that she could feel his breath like a summer breeze fan the hot colour on her cheek; and then he told her all, as he had written in the night previous on the paper James Farrell had hidden from the eyes of curious servants, adding, “You couldn’t help it dear; and better now that you should have discovered that you could not return the love I gave than—when it was too late.”

It was with difficulty he could bring his lips to utter words which should part her from him. It was no boy’s love he had given her, but such passion as a man knows but once in a lifetime. To lose her was to lose all that was life to him, and yet she was so dear that he felt almost a happiness in restoring to her freedom.

To have her near him, as he had her then—for a few brief moments to let her head, with its golden wealth, rest on his shoulder—to gaze into the blue depths of her upturned eyes, and press her towards him in one last embrace—for all he asked, she sobbing the while, for even in her new love she felt how great was his love for her.

“And you forgive me, Nat?” she asked, for she could not deny that her heart was no longer in his keeping; and yet there was a reverence, a feeling purer even than love itself, which still lurked in her bosom for this man to whom she was all in all.

“Forgive you, darling!” he answered. “It is I who need forgiveness for the wrong I would have done you—maybe, dear, to have made your life one of misery—when the world would have fallen from your eyes, and you learnt to know you had mistaken friendship for a holier feeling.”

He had drawn her near—so near—to him then

looking down into her upraised eyes, as he knew he should never look again, for after this he felt it would be a sin to press his lips to hers, to speak to her of that which was burning within him like a consuming fire, to let her hand pass over the sunny braids of her golden hair, the loud beating of his heart pressed against hers, alone speaking of the agony he was enduring.

A few moments only, but to him an eternity, and then the sound of approaching footsteps on the tessellated floor without aroused him to a sense of his situation.

"Kiss me, Nesta," he asked, feverishly, his voice scarce above a whisper; when for one second their lips met, and then staggered from her side, fearful that she should discover the misery which had made his face to become like that of an old man, with his great pain delineated in each feature.

And she remained where he had left her, as though rooted to the spot, gazing without on the dead brown leaves tossed hither and thither on the soft green lawn, when the door again opened, and Sir Henry, followed by the others, re-entered the apartment.

CHAPTER V.

"It's a regular professional hand, Sir Henry," Westwood, the detective, was saying, "and I should advise all the servants should be strictly questioned, for, as with the burglary at Lerton Park, I'm of opinion the thief is in, not out of the house."

"That idea is preposterous," the Captain laughed. "Why, I distinctly saw two men as unlike any I have seen in Sir Henry's establishment as it was possible to be."

They had advanced into the room now, so intent on the subject they were discussing, that Nathaniel and Nesta passed almost unnoticed. Mademoiselle, who had followed behind, anxious to learn the result of the detective's visit, ascribing the frightened scared look on the girl's white face to the events of the previous evening.

Bab Westwood still adhered to his opinion, at first regarding Jack with professional contempt, and then fixing his ferret eyes on him so intently that the colour leapt to his temples.

"Confound his impudence!" he said, under his breath, when the servants, in accordance with the detective's request, filed into the apartment. But nothing was gained from the catechising to which they were subjected, further than a conviction on the part of Westwood, the thief was not one of their number, determining him to pursue his inquiries in another quarter.

"Never fear, sir, Jemmy Westwood will be even with them yet!" he said; when, after having taken his leave of the family, he turned to Jack who had followed him to the door. "The Lerton Park lot and these are one and the same, depend upon it."

But notwithstanding the detective's assertion to the contrary, the burglary at the Priory soon became to be looked upon by the outward world as one of those where thieves had got off scot-free, Sir Henry and his daughter entertaining no further hope of ever regaining their lost property.

Autumn was quickly merging into winter, and Captain Amherst had business in town, which made his return imperative.

Out of gratitude for the life he had saved him, the Baronet had given his consent to his union with Nesta, however reluctantly he did so, when he contrasted his fast *blond* style with the more quiet, gentlemanly tone of the young Rector. But with Nesta he was so kind, so gentle, that she felt herself drawn towards him with an irresistible force; and when the time of parting came, she clung round his neck, her soft cheek pressed against his, while her ears drank in the words of affection and love he poured into them.

"I shall miss you so much Jack!" she sobbed.

"Not more, darling, than I shall you," he answered; "but the spring will soon return, Nesta, and then I shall come to claim my bride;

but you must write me nice long letters mind," he smiled.

A day or two after he was gone, and Mademoiselle was heard to declare that her young lady would spoil her beauty if she gave way as she did, while with Nesta herself, now that they were once more alone, her father resumed his solitary amusements, leaving her to her own resources, and making her to feel with redoubled bitterness the lovelessness of the life which was her portion.

As day followed day, and with the exception of one short note bearing the London postmark, she heard no more of her lover, her heart sank within her. She wrote to him then, imploring him to send her, if but a line, to relieve her mind from the great anxiety she was undergoing, confiding alone in Dick the fears which made her days miserable, her nights sleepless.

"I will make him answer!" the boy replied, when on one of these occasions she had been pouring out her troubles to him, his eyes the while flashing with suppressed anger at the thought that the man he had introduced into his uncle's house should have trifled with the affections of the girl who was dear to him as a sister.

But a letter in a strange hand came in reply to the one he sent. It was from a friend of the Captain, regretting that serious illness had up to then prevented him from writing in reply to Miss Musgrave's letters; further adding, that Jack was so far recovered as to hope in a few days to be able to resume his pen.

"I thought it was something of the kind," Dick said, as he refolded the letter; but the sad, weary eyes which were raised to his told him how much the life of his cousin was wrapped up in that of his friend, and a feeling akin to regret came over him that he should have been the instrument in bringing them together.

"If any harm or trouble should come to her through it I shall never forgive myself," he mentally mused; and then to throw off the gloom which seemed to have spread itself over the Priory he ordered his horse, determining to shake off what he looked upon as foolish fears by a ride over to Northwick.

It was a good five miles which lay between that village and the Priory, and a fine Scotch mist was making itself unpleasantly felt as he cantered along, sometimes passing by tiny plantations, where the wind soughed and sighed amid the now almost bare branches of the swaying trees; and then again into the open with its driving damp and dank to his very face.

Nathaniel was always now fully occupied with his parochial duties, and that which had been his loss in the bright summer-tide now passed, had become the gain to Northwick, for never were shepherd and flock more closely united than at present.

The *Mermaid* had long been housed for the winter, her master giving her now as little thought as though she had never spread her white sails, dear to him as a thing of life, when like a swan she made her way over the silver waters of the adjacent river.

He was seated in his library when Dick was announced, engaged in the assorting of coal-tickets and blankets for the poor in the approaching winter.

"My dear boy, how delighted I am!" he said, grasping Dick's hand, and hurriedly tossing the sorted and unsorted pieces of paste-board into a drawer he opened for the purpose, in a manner which threatened a repetition of the work he was supposed to have completed.

"I am afraid I am disturbing you, Mr. Wardroper!" the boy replied, after returning his salutation.

"Oh, no! not in the least," was the rejoinder; "for to tell the truth, like a child at his lessons, I am only too glad of an excuse to throw aside work for a while. I trust Sir Henry is quite well, and—Miss Musgrave?"

Nesta he would have said, but stayed ere the name fell from his lips. He had no right to call her so now, and he had so schooled himself during the last few weeks that he could calmly review the past without betraying, by one sign

on his features, the pain which was working within—a pain which would never die.

"My uncle is as usual," Dick answered. "But—" and he hesitated, causing the blood for a second to go from the listener; the next he was himself again, and anxious to hear the end—"you know Jack has left us some time now," the lad continued, "and although he went away as my cousin's affianced husband, with the exception of one letter Nesta has heard nothing from him. True, I wrote, and in reply had a letter stating he was ill, and that when sufficiently recovered, which he hoped to be in a few days, he would write himself. A week has passed since then, and nothing further. It makes me feel awfully nervous, you know, Mr. Wardroper, for I hold myself in some way accountable for the way in which he serves Nesta; and if he should have deceived her, which Heaven forbid! and we were to meet again, I would not be answerable for the consequences. You don't mind my coming to you with my troubles, do you?" the boy added; "but I feel so confoundedly miserable, Nesta's sad face seeming to me like a reproach, that I should have brought this trouble upon her."

Dick had seated himself in the chair Nathaniel had offered him, as he awaited the Rector's reply.

"Do you know anything of Captain Amherst's family?" Nathaniel asked.

"Only what he has told me," was the response. "His father and mother are both dead. As a lad he left home, enlisting at an early age in Her Majesty's service; since which, although he has worked himself up to his present position, he has never communicated with his relatives, his sisters fully believing him to be dead."

"And how long is it since he has left the army?" Nathaniel asked.

"Not long, I believe, after he had attained his captaincy."

"And Sir Henry, I conclude, is fully satisfied!" he continued, the slightest tinge of irony in his tone which he could not conceal.

"Oh, my uncle naturally looks on him as the preserver of his life, and regards him through rose-coloured glasses!"

"And you mean to admit you do not?" the Rector added, smiling the while.

"No, no; do not mistake me," Dick said, angrily. "It is not that; but you have heard Mr. Wardroper, coming events cast their shadows before them. I fully believe Jack Amherst to be a gentleman in one sense, but his truth, with respect to my cousin, is what I doubt, and if he were villain enough to deceive her, I would never forgive him!"

Another half-hour, and Dick arose; he felt better now, he told Nathaniel, since he had spoken to someone, and with a promise that he would let him know how matters went on, he bade him good-bye.

And the Rector stood by the window watching him as he rode from the gate out into the gathering mist, a revelation of feelings stirring within him and a strange fear taking possession of his heart. And then, as horse and rider disappeared in the distance, a fixed determination came over his features.

"Coming events cast their shadows before them!" he said, repeating Dick's words. "My love! my love! I will save you yet!"

Long after he remained seated by the library table, his chin resting on his folded hands, deep in thought, but what was passing in his mind he would not have breathed, not even to Dick. "I may be wrong," he said. "I only hope I am," and then, like one decided on a certain action, he looked the drawer into which he had bundled the work on which he had been engaged when his visitor was announced, and arose from the table.

"I think of going to town for a few days, Farrell," he said the next morning, when the curate entered the room. "Don't forget Widow Lawson's son. I don't think he will last much longer."

"And from what I hear he will not be any loss to the community at large when he goes," the other replied. "He's a bad lot, Mr. Wardroper; and had it not been that he is disabled now, and he thinks as he told his mother, the game is up, he would be as bad as ever—a lazy, good-for-

nothing fellow, who, according to his own confession, never did a day's work in his life!"

But Nathaniel made little reply. He was thinking less of Joe Lawson and his sins than he was of the object he had in view; so, merely remarking that it was a long lane which had no turning, he rang the bell and gave his directions to Mrs. Bland to make preparations for his journey.

"I want to catch the 1.30 train from Murtleborough!"

"I may be away over a week," he added, turning to Mr. Farrell, when the door closed on the housekeeper, "but in the event of anything important occurring that address will find me. And now kindly assist me to some coffee, I have not much time to spare."

A short while after, and he was being driven towards his destination—but one object in view; and a girl's face with large sad eyes ever before him urging him onward.

CHAPTER VI.

IT WAS A COLD, raw day, with a heavy fog rising from the marsh-land near the river, and the wind moaned amid the branches of the trees as Nathaniel proceeded towards his destination.

They had not gone far when a white cottage a little way from the roadside came in view; and the Rector, on consulting his watch, found he had a few moments to spare told his man to wait whilst he alighted. The gate was open as though someone had only recently passed through, and on the door being unclosed from within, he fancied he heard men's voices in conversation.

"Lor'! Mr. Wardroper, who'd ha' thought o' seein' you this miserable day!" the woman said, who now made her appearance, whilst she stood, her whole form filling the doorway.

"I am on my way to the station, Mrs. Lawson, having been called to London on important business, but having a few minutes to spare, thought to see how Joe was as I passed by."

"Well, sir, I don't think he's no better nor no worse, thank you all the same," the woman replied; but, Nathaniel, expressing a wish to see her son at once, as he had but a few moments, a hesitation to comply with his request was palpable in her manner.

"He's asleep just now, sir!" she answered, in a tone sufficiently loud to have awakened the dead beneath the green graves in the churchyard close by; "but if you will wait a moment I'll just peep in," when, leaving him standing opposite, she entered an inner room.

She had almost shut the door where Nathaniel was; but a curiosity, for which he could not account, prompting him to push it open, he distinctly heard a scuffle as of someone making a hasty retreat, and shortly after Mrs. Lawson reappeared.

"Now, sir, if you will step in!" she said.

The room which the clergyman entered was a kind of back kitchen, with a small window facing the bed, which stood in one corner opposite a door leading to a garden, which ran at the back.

The sick man opened his eyes, looking at the clergyman in a half-dazed way, like one just awaking, and not wholly conscious of his surroundings.

"I hope you are better, Joe!" Nathaniel asked, advancing to the bedside. "I am going away for a few days, but I have left directions with Mr. Farrell to see you have all you want!"

"You are very kind, sir!" Joe answered, "but I'm afraid it ain't no mortal good. I shan't be a wantin' anything much longer!"

"Whilst there's life there's hope, Joe!" was the Rector's reply; "but you had some one to see you just now, hadn't you?" he asked.

The man raised himself on his elbow, looking the while keenly at his visitor before he made answer.

"Not I, sir!" he said, after a few moments. "What makes you think as how any one would care to come and see the likes o' me, Mr. Wardroper?"

"I thought I heard voices, that was all. But I cannot stay now, or I shall miss the train." When telling him he would see him on his return he left the room.

His man and trap were outside awaiting his exit from the cottage, the man saying he should have to drive fast if they had to catch the 1.30.

"I thought it was you, sir, a few moments ago, when the other gentleman came out!" he said, handing the reins over to his master.

"The other gentleman! What do you mean, Gregory!" Nathaniel asked.

"Why, sir, Captain Amherst, who used to be staying up at the Priory. He came out just afore you did, and I thought, o' course, you'd seen him!"

"Are you sure it was Captain Amherst?" the Rector asked.

"I'd take my Bible oath on it, sir!" was the man's emphatic reply, which, to his amazement, had the effect of making an alteration in his master's plans, who said he had no further intention of going to London; but that as they were so far on the road he would drive to the Priory.

"It is all right!" Dick said, who was the first to see him when he had been ushered into the drawing-room. "I am so glad you have come, for I am awfully sorry I said anything to cast a doubt on Jack's conduct, and I wouldn't for the world you should hint that I had done so to Nesta."

"Is he here, then?" was all the Rector could ask, his servant's assertion and his own conviction that some one was in converse with Joe Lawson filling his mind in puzzled confusion.

"Here! no," Dick replied, quickly. "But Nesta had a letter this morning, and she has been quite another creature ever since. He had a relapse, so he writes, but took the first opportunity that he was well enough to send her a line, knowing how anxious his little girl would be, followed, doubtless, by expressions of love, too precious for any but her own eyes to feast on. For that was all she told me, and I have caught her several times reading and re-reading it, as though her life hung on its contents."

But what Nathaniel would have answered was stayed on his lips, for the door opening, Nesta herself entered the room.

She held out her hand—a glad light in her blue eyes—he, the while, looking at her with a wondrous pity in his own—pitiful so great that even had he had it in his power to dispel her dream of happiness, to denounce the man whose slightest word acted as magic to ensure her happiness or her misery, he could not have brought himself to be one to have thrown her idol from the pedestal.

Sir Henry was laid up with gout, but would be glad if Mr. Wardroper would see him in his bedroom, and Nathaniel was glad to follow the servant, who, after having delivered his message, waited to conduct him to his master's apartment.

He felt a relief when the door closed behind him, for school himself as he had done he could not without pain take Nesta's hand within his and knew that she was lost to him for ever—a pain which was doubled now that he knew the duty which would make him the one to destroy her dream of happiness, and cause it to melt from her heart, taking with it all faith and love and leaving the picture of life, once so brilliant, a worthless dud.

But in the intensity of his love, which he could never outlive, for her sake he determined to sift this mystery to the bottom. Either Gregory was mistaken when he assured him that it was Captain Amherst who was Joe Lawson's visitor, or else Jack had some motive he could not at present account for in representing himself to be in London, when in reality he was in the neighbourhood.

Sir Henry was, from the effects of his complaint, in an exceedingly irritable state of mind when the Rector entered his room, declaring Dick was an ungrateful young scamp, who would do nothing for him, leaving him entirely to the mercy of servants, whilst Nesta was almost as bad, thinking of nothing but her own matters.

"I only wish Jack was here!" he said. "If I had a son of my own he could not have been more kind; and here are this boy and girl, who ought to stand me most, paying no more regard to my sufferings than if I were an old tom-cat. It is abominable, Mr. Wardroper; and now I suppose you, like the rest, want to be off too!" he added, irritably, when Nathaniel told him he was so sorry, but having to be in Murtleborough at a certain time he would not be able to stay with him long.

"Take care of your uncle, Dick!" he said, when later on he descended to the room where he had left him with Nesta to say good-bye; and a few moments after he was driving through the dreary mist on his way to the town.

The quaint old street which formed its principal thoroughfare looked very miserable, the chief shops being already lighted, notwithstanding that the hour was still early; and when he alighted at the little hotel of which Murtleborough boasted, Nathaniel was not sorry to avail himself of the comfort of the warm, snug coffee-room.

There was but one occupant of it, and the Rector, without looking in his direction, was advancing to the fire when, to his surprise, the other addressed him.

"You here again, Westwood!" he replied, on recognising the detective. "Any fresh business, or have you any further clue to the burglars at 'The Priory'?"

"Ah! that's it air!" the man answered, when looking round cautiously, more from habit than from any fear of being overheard, he whispered something in Nathaniel's ear which made him start.

"You think you are on the right scent!" he asked.

A smile of satisfaction passed over the other's features as he answered,—

"I wish I were as sure of a thousand, Mr. Wardroper," but the door opening to admit visitors he refrained from entering further on the subject, alone indulging in a wink, as he again became buried in the contents of the newspaper.

"Drive back to the Priory," was the order given to his man, when after having transacted a little business in the town the Rector once more took his seat in the trap.

Dick was alone when he was, for the second time that day, ushered into the drawing-room of Sir Henry Muscaver.

"I am so glad to find you alone!" he said, after the surprise his return had created in the lad's mind was passed. "I have something of importance to communicate to you."

Dick raised his eyes in astonishment to the colourless face of his friend, whose every feature was working with the intensity of his excitement.

"What is it, Wardroper?" the boy asked. "Has anything terrible happened?"

For the moment the Rector could not reply, shrinking as he did from the task before him; and then, as the voice of Nesta, singing in an adjoining apartment, fell on his ear, it recalled him to himself.

"For her sake!" he mentally exclaimed; when turning to Dick. "Yes, it is terrible for her," he replied, motioning to whence the song proceeded. "Captain Amherst is not in London," he continued, "but is the guest of Lord Glenore, at Glenore Castle."

"Glenore Castle!" he ejaculated. "Surely, you are mistaken, Mr. Wardroper!"

"I know you would say so," the other answered; "and to convince you that I am not, I want you to accompany me to his lordship's residence to-night. It is but a two-mile walk across the fields, and if you will grant me a bed for my man and a stall in your stables for my horse, I shall be forever grateful."

Dick looked at Nathaniel in dismay; his usual pleasant features were now stern and set, a softness in his dark eyes alone telling how much this self-imposed task was costing him.

The song had ceased now, and a few moments after Nesta had rejoined them; and as Nathaniel looked at her, he wavered in his purpose.

"After all they might be wrong," he mused.

"And should his suspicions prove incorrect, how she would despise him for conduct apparently so mean—for know it she must, did he and Dick carry out their intentions; whilst, on the other hand, it would be unmanly, cowardly, to call back when he had gone so far."

The dinner that followed was a tedious meal, and he was not sorry when at last the ladies rose, leaving him and Dick together.

The fog had lifted when the moon rose, and the evening which followed boded well for their enterprise. The raw, cold wind had veered round to the west, rendering the air soft and balmy as a summer's night.

"We are going for a walk, Nesta!" Dick said, peeping into the drawing-room where she was with Mademoiselle; and a few minutes after they were crossing the lawn, until they reached where the river flowed on placidly in the moonlight. For some distance they walked along the path by its side, until, coming to where the fields stretched out in a different direction, they continued their way; when drawing near to where Glenore Park, belted on either side by a tiny forest of trees, came in view, they saw a man approaching from the opposite direction, and Nathaniel at once recognised Westwood, the detective.

CHAPTER VII.

"It's all right, gentlemen," he said, moving towards the plantation, merely staying a moment in the moonlight to see the time by a watch which he took from his waistcoat pocket, adding, in answer to Dick's inquiry, that it was just on the stroke of ten.

"My idea is we are only losing time," the lad said, when they had been perambulating the woods around Glenore for another hour, each silent as the stars which peeped between the branches overhead without any result.

They were now within sight of the main entrance to the house itself, when a slight sound fell on their ears.

"Hush!" Westwood said, drawing back behind a tree, and then they saw the door open cautiously, and the figure of a man appear from within, Dick withholding the exclamation which arose to his lips, as the features of Jack Amherst became distinctly visible.

Like one rooted to the spot by an uncontrollable power, he waited with bated breath, Westwood's grip on his arm enforcing silence as they watched; whilst the moon, which had again emerged from the clouds, that for a moment had obscured her light, beamed forth in soft effulgence bathing lawn and copse beneath her rays. It was then that two other forms stealthily came from the other side, creeping beneath the windows, which reached nearly to the ground, until they approached to where the Captain awaited them. For a moment or two they were engaged in conversation, and then all three silently, and with noiseless tread, entered the mansion.

"What can it all mean?" Dick asked of Nathaniel; but he was not kept long in suspense, for the report of firearms falling on the stillness around caused them to start; and Westwood, putting a whistle to his lips, two men, who till then they had not seen, came in view.

"I don't like the sound of that," he said, a look of alarm overspreading his features, "but move quick, lads. There's no more than three of them, and if we don't run them to earth now my name ain't Jimmy Westwood!"

Lights were quickly appearing at each window, showing that the inmates of the Castle were fully aroused, while a bell, fixed on the roof for the occasion in case of alarm, resounded loudly in the still night air.

The door, which the burglars, to more speedily effect their exit from the mansion, had left unfastened, enabled the police to enter without delay, whilst it also proved favourable to the others to effect their escape, during the time that the attention of all was riveted on the form of a man lying on the tessellated floor of the entrance-hall.

His body had fallen close by the gilt balustrades of the staircase, which had become

smeared with his life-blood, as he had gripped them, when the bullet from the butler's revolver hit him.

It was the report which had alarmed the household, Lord Glenore no less frightened than his servants, when he appeared on the scene.

"Amherst shot!" he exclaimed, pushing his way through till he reached to where the wounded man lay, but not before the Rector had had time to breathe a word to him. And then they lifted him gently as they would an infant, until, at his Lordship's commands, they laid him on a silk couch in the adjoining drawing-room—even Westwood, although disgusted at having let the others slip through his fingers, felt pity for him whose life was so quickly drawing to a close.

"The cleverest thief in London!" he whispered to Nathaniel, who, in his holy vocation, was administering comfort to the dying man, around whose lips, already blue with the tinge of death, a smile gathered when the detective's words fell on his ears.

"No surer proof than the evading you!" he said, holding out his hand the while; "but I shall give you no more trouble in future. Good-bye!" And then begging for a few moments alone with Nathaniel, Lord Glenore gave orders that the room should be cleared, most of the servants to return to their beds, and refreshments to be served in the dining-room for the gentlemen, and in the servants' hall for the police.

"You will join us, Westwood!" he said, as he and Dick left the room. I want to hear all I can of this business, and," turning to Nathaniel, "I hope to see you presently;" and then the door closed on them, leaving Jack and the man he had so cruelly wrangled together.

"I want to speak of her," he said, raising his eyes, over which the last film was already gathering, to the face of his companion. Poor little Nesta, I think she will be sorry when she hears I am gone, but in time she even will forget, as we all do, the dead," and a sad smile spread over his countenance, "and she will learn to love you. But that is not what I wanted to say now. Don't let it break her heart as it would have done my mother's had she lived to know that Jack Amherst was a thief. Tell her I was shot, accidentally killed, anything but that, for with all my faults, believe me, I loved her with such love as I never before felt for any living creature, and I could not rest in my grave if I thought she had learnt to despise me."

He was silent for a space; the suffering he was undergoing causing the sweat in great beads to stand on his forehead, and Nathaniel would fain have summoned assistance, but he motioned for him to remain by his side.

"I have more to tell you first," he said. "I was not always like this. My father was a gentleman; my mother I never knew, for she died when I was only three years old, and the woman he placed in her position was cold and impious, thinking only of her own children and their good, embittering my only parent against me whenever an opportunity occurred, oftentimes making me the scapegoat for the faults of her own brood, until goaded to madness I left home friendless and penniless; too proud to ask assistance from those I had left behind; too idle to earn my living by honest labour. In a mad humour I enlisted, but after two years I grew weary of barrack associations and army routine. When in this mind I was thrown in the society of some men more idle than myself, and led on from one extravagance to another, until from beginning as a gentle swindler I became a professional."

He paused here.

"I can't bring myself to own it," he said. "It seems so helious to me now, my past life—I mean since I have known her; and many a time I have tried to throw them off, my pals, but it was no use; you know that they had a firm grip of me, and could have sent me to prison at any time, and so I had to go on, working with them, and all the while praying for something to occur which would stop the plans I had been forced to make. But it has come now,"

he added, "the parting with her, the only pang I feel at leaving a world which has never been too kind to poor Jack."

He turned on his side then, the pain had grown so intense; he could feel his life-blood welling from his heart, and Nathaniel's hand in his all the while, his last moments rendered easier with the knowledge that the secret of his crime was safe in his keeping.

Even Westwood, at the Rector's request, had promised not to divulge to Lord Glenore how the man he had regarded as a friend had become implicated in that night's work and so, instead of the criminal he really was, Jack Amherst was regarded as a hero, who had lost his life in defending his host's property.

The attempted burglary at Glenore Castle was discussed far and near when once it became known, but why the Captain should have been on the scene was never explained, whilst the fact that he was there as a guest of the noble owner was sufficient in itself to enhance him in the eyes of those who were ignorant of the truth. Of his friends and relatives nothing could be learnt, notwithstanding that advertisements were inserted in the leading papers, and so, unknown amid strangers, the dead man lay, whilst strange hands placed flowers, rare and sweet, on the lifeless clay.

Nesta had begged so hard to see him before the damp earth fell on his coffin, her tears the while bedewing the wreath she had herself woven; and so they led her gently to the chamber where he lay, and she sobbed and moaned in her great grief, Lord Glenore feeling pity for the young heart whose love was torn from her in the beginning. Nathaniel standing by, his own breaking; for was not his love greater far, and he was as nought to her.

And so they laid him to rest in Northwick churchyard. It was her wish, Nathaniel reading the service over his grave filled with flowers from the Priory conservatory, and the Northwick bells in their solemn toll telling of another soul gone to its last account, whilst a cross of spotless marble was placed by Lord Glenore himself in remembrance of the service he was supposed to have done him and which had cost him his life.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was six months more, and people had almost ceased to remember the events of that night when Jack Amherst had breathed his last in Glenore Castle; and Nathaniel with Dick, who could not be prevailed upon to rest beneath its roof, returned in the early grey of the November morning to the Priory.

Mademoiselle had taken her charge away from the scenes which associated themselves so with the lover she had lost, for at first they feared her mind had given way beneath the blow, as for weeks she could not be brought to realise her loss.

That night on which she had impressed her last kiss on his cold forehead, placing the pure white blossoms she had woven together with sprays of maidenhair fern on his lifeless bosom, had faded from her memory, save as the phantom of some dreadful dream, the while she would sit for hours watching the path from which he had been accustomed to approach the window, where he would come to her in the happy summer-tide—all gone now, even to the dead brown leaves which had scattered it over long after.

But in the heyday of youth time works wonders, and in six months more Nesta was back again with the spring flowers and softer sky, and, although calmer, her manner had resumed its usual pleasantness.

She and Nathaniel had met once or twice since, and further than on the last occasion, when they were near the churchyard, and he led her to where a marble cross denoted where he lay, no allusion was made to her dead lover.

What rumours had reached her she did not say, but he seemed as completely to have gone from her heart as though he had never been,

and the love she once bore him lay buried in his grave.

"It was better so," she said, as they turned from the spot. "Had he lived I might have learned to despise him," and then she stooped to where the flowers which covered it had bloomed forth in their fresh young life, and the hot tears she ever shed for Jack Amherst fell on their leaves.

At the gate they parted, she letting her hand for a moment to rest in his.

"You are very kind," she said, raising her eyes, half-sad, half-glad, to his face, and then she left him, with a wild yearning at his heart and a dull weary pain he could not drive from it.

And he still stood leaning on the gate which divided God's acre from the rest; the birds overhead singing in their gladness in the bright sunshine; a lark in the fulness of his joy trilling as it soared to the heavens above, across which fleecy clouds, thin as a gossamer veil, moved slowly along, and he thinking but of her.

But the little pony-carriage which had brought her thither was out of sight now, and he was about to turn away too, when a man approached to where he stood.

"Excuse me, Mr. Wardroper!" he said, "but I think when the likes of him gets such as that it ain't such a bad game after all!"

He was pointing to the marble cross, laughing the while at what he considered a good joke.

It was Joe Lawson!

"What did you know of him?" the Rector asked.

"What did I know of him?" the man repeated. "Why, weren't we pals; and wasn't it I who put him on the last lay, and I'll in bed the while. But I'm all right now, governor, and he lies there (and he pointed to the grave), with a milk-white cross at his head;" and he again broke into loud laughter. "But that comes o' bein' a gentleman," he added bitterly. "Good-bye, master; may be I'll come to church o' Sunday."

(Continued on page 304.)

In Cheshire at one time, farmers' servants were accustomed to leave their employers' service from Christmas Day to New Year's Day.

It is probably the general impression that posters and handbills are modern inventions, but it has been discovered that the ancient Romans practised this method of advertising. In digging at Herculaneum there was brought to light a pillar covered with bills, one on top of another, which were found to be programmes and announcements of public meetings and even election proclamations.

The diving for the pearl oysters found off the Korean Island of Quelpart is entirely done by women. Dressed in a kind of bathing suit, with a sickle in one hand and a gourd with a bag tied to it in front of them, they swim out from the shore as far as half a mile—boats cannot be afforded—and there dive, probably a depth of forty or fifty feet to the bottom, cut the weeds with the sickle, or, if they find a pearl oyster, tear it off from the stone, and then put it into the bag, which is kept floating by the gourd. They do not go back before the bag is filled, which often takes more than half an hour. Although they are magnificent swimmers, one cannot help admiring their endurance when one thinks that this work is begun as early as February. The pearl oyster is both used on the island and exported. It is very large, some measuring ten inches in diameter, and very fleshy. Unlike other oysters, it has only one shell, which is often used by the Koreans as an ash-tray, and from which mother-of-pearl is obtained. Covered with this shell as with a roof, the oyster lives fastened to a rock. Its meat is considered a luxuriant dish, and one oyster costs as much as six cents on the island. Pearls are but seldom found in the oyster. For export the oysters are torn out of the shell and strung on thin sticks. Although white when fresh, the colour changes to a dark red, like that of a dried apricot.

CLIFFE COURT.

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CHAPTER XX.

For some days after her parting with Colonel Stuart Lady Carlyon did not go out—did not even leave her own apartment, where she was attended to by Robson, and visited by Dr. West—her husband she did not see.

She did not rebel against Sir Ascot's orders that she should keep indoors, for she had neither the inclination or energy to resist them. She felt weak and languid, and her appetite had almost entirely deserted her; the only thing that helped to keep up her strength was a glass of port wine that she took every morning.

"I shall leave off Dr. West's medicines," she observed to Robson. "I am sure instead of doing me good, they only weaken me."

"Do you think so, my lady? Dr West is supposed to be a clever man, and I fancied he understood your ladyship's case."

"Perhaps it is more difficult for him to minister to a diseased mind than a diseased body," returned Alicia, in a low tone.

Robson had poured some mixture from a bottle, and now held it towards her mistress, who, however, turned from it with a gesture of distaste.

"I cannot drink it—it has such a sickly smell that it makes me feel quite faint."

The woman did not try to persuade her, but put the glass down.

"What will you have then, my lady? You know you have tasted nothing since yesterday, and you really require nourishment. I will get you some port."

She went into the next room, and returned with it. Lady Carlyon drank a little, and shivered slightly as she put down the glass.

"It is strange, but the wine tastes to me exactly as the medicine did," she remarked, wiping her lips with her handkerchief. "Are you sure you put it in a clean glass?"

"Quite sure, my lady. I am most particular in such matters."

"Yes, I know, but I fancied you might have made a mistake this time. It is strange it should have so curious effect on me."

"Your ladyship's palate must be out of order," said Robson, calmly, "and the consequence is everything tastes alike to you."

"Perhaps that is it," assented Alicia, leaning wearily back in her chair—too listless to argue the point.

A strange numbness was stealing over her, taking all energy from limbs and brain. It was by no means a disagreeable sensation, rather, indeed, pleasurable in its effects, for it bathed her in a soft languor, during which all her troubles seemed to melt imperceptibly away, and she was conscious of a sort of *douceur* state, that must have somewhat resembled an opium-eater's dream.

Robson watched her keenly, but Lady Carlyon was oblivious of her scrutiny, and presently Dr. West came in.

"Is it all right?" he said in a whisper, to the woman.

She returned his glance with one as significant.

"All right—she has taken the solution."

He nodded in a satisfied manner, and took a seat by Alicia's side, feeling her pulse, and looking very intently at her eyes, the pupils of which were considerably dilated. She did not appear to notice the closeness of his examination.

"I think it is safe to try," he muttered to himself; then aloud, and offering his arm, he said, "Let me conduct you downstairs, Lady Carlyon."

She acquiesced without a moment's hesitation, putting her arm in his, and together they descended to the library, where the Baronet awaited them, his face white and haggard, and his eyes anxious.

"Please a chair for your wife, if you please, Carlyon," said Dr. West, pleasantly. "I think she would prefer sitting at the head of the table there, with her back to the light."

Sir Ascot did as he was requested, and Alicia sat down, glancing vacantly at the papers with which the table was strewn.

"She will do," muttered the doctor, in a low voice, to Sir Ascot.

"Are you sure—quite sure?"

"As sure as it is possible to be under the circumstances. Remember, this is only an experiment, so I cannot answer positively for the result."

"If it should fail I am a ruined man, for this is my last day of grace," returned the Baronet, gnawing savagely at his moustache, while his eyes were fixed on his wife, to whom this conversation was inaudible. "The best thing for me will be a bullet in my brain."

"Nonsense! That is, indeed, a last resource! Call the butler in, and he can witness the deed."

The butler came—the same dark-browed man who had opened the door to Arline some time ago.

Alicia did not notice his entrance, and Sir Ascot explained to him that he was there for the purpose of witnessing his mistress's signature.

Dr. West put a pen in his fingers, and placing his hand on her shoulder—a familiarity which, strange to say, she did not resent—he bent down and said, in low distinct tones,—

"Write your name here, if you please, Lady Carlyon—your name in full."

She obeyed passively, and wrote her signature,—

"Alicia Mary Carlyon."

Then the butler and Dr. West appended their own names, and the former left the room.

"Well, what do you say to my experiment now?" asked West, as the door closed.

Sir Ascot grasped his hand.

"I owe you a debt of gratitude that I shall never be able to repay. You have saved me!" he exclaimed.

"That is all right. You can advance me the first instalment of the debt, which is five hundred pounds!" remarked the doctor, and Sir Ascot took out his cheque-book and wrote an order for the amount.

"That makes us square, I think!"

West put it away in his pocket-book, returning the Baronet's IOU, and then Sir Ascot's attention became attracted by his wife, who had fallen back in her chair, and was now in a deep slumber.

"How long will that last?" he inquired.

"I don't know. As I before reminded you, this is an experiment; and I cannot possibly say how it may terminate—whether she will retain any knowledge of what has passed, or whether it will all be a blank to her. We can only wait and see."

When Alicia awoke it was growing dusk, and for a minute she stared round, bewildered at finding herself in the library.

The sound of voices made her look towards the window, and there saw her husband and Dr. West. As he perceived she was awake the latter came to her side.

"How do you feel, Lady Carlyon—quite yourself?" he asked, taking her hand.

"No; my head is not so clear as it ought to be, I think. Can you get me some water?"

He fetched her a glass, and she drank it.

"What brought me here?" she inquired, after a moment's silence.

"Think back, and see if you can remember!"

She put her hand to her brow, striving to collect her thoughts.

"I remember your bringing me down," she said, slowly, "and then—and then you told me to sign my name," she looked up, quickly, her eyes growing more intelligent. "What did I sign my name for?"

"Oh, nothing. A mere matter of form—no more."

"But I should like to understand," she persisted, never removing her gaze from his face. "I recollect I felt strangely dazed, and seemed to myself like one in a dream, who has no volition of his own. What was the cause of it?"

"Your delicate state of health, probably."

She shook her head, unconvinced.

"That is a poor explanation. You must have seen I was not myself. Why, then, did you bring me here for business matters?"

"My dear Lady Carlyon, you came of your own free will. I had nothing to do with coercing you. It is true I am a physician, but I am not omniscient for all that. I cannot be expected to look in my patients' minds, although I prescribe for their bodies."

Sir gave an impatient sigh, was quiet a few minutes, then started up, panting with excitement.

"I see it all. I have been tricked, deceived by both of you!" she cried out, her eyes flashing from West to her husband. "Between you, you have concocted some vile plot, by whose aid my powers of will deserted me, and while I was under the influence of drugs, perhaps, you have made me sign the mortgage!"

They neither made any attempt to reply, and Dr. West moved uneasily from her side.

"If this is the case—if my surmise is true—all England shall echo with the story of your baseness!" she continued, her voice ringing out, clear and shrill, through the vaulted apartment. "If I am a woman, weak and helpless, there are men in the world good enough and powerful enough to espouse my cause and punish you as you deserve, and I will call them to my aid. Do not think any consideration for the name I bear, or the publicity that will ensue, will have power to deter me. I will tell you, Sir Ascot Carlyon, that even yet I am not conquered, and as long as life lasts I will defy you!"

It is impossible to describe how splendid she looked, as she stood before the two men, her whole frame instinct with the indignation that possessed her. Her cheeks were flushed, and she flung back from her face the long strands of hair that had become loosened during her slumber, and which now fell in thick, silky masses round her throat and shoulders.

Sir Ascot absolutely quailed under her gaze, and for a few minutes there was silence, while he looked helplessly at West, as though imploring him to come to his assistance. The latter made an effort to prove himself equal to the emergency.

"Don't excite yourself so much Lady Carlyon," he said, soothingly; "if you do, I really cannot answer for the consequences."

"Do not speak to me, sir!" she exclaimed, with haughty contempt. "Henceforward there shall not even be the pretence of your acting as my medical attendant. If I require treatment I will endeavour to find a doctor, who, in addition to his profession, is also a gentleman!"

Dr. West bit his lip till it bled; the taunt stung him to the quick, well as he knew it was deserved.

Alicia cast one glance of withering scorn on her husband, then advanced towards the door, where her progress was intercepted by the doctor.

"Let me pass, sir!" she said, imperiously.

"Pardon me, but in consideration for other people it is my duty not to lose sight of you, for in your present condition it is impossible to say what you might do," he returned, suavely, holding her arm with a grip of iron. "In these cases one cannot exercise too much caution."

It was vain for her to attempt to move, and it was clear there was no chance of Sir Ascot coming to her assistance, for it was to his interest to acquiesce in Dr. West's plans.

"I shall accompany you upstairs myself, and put you in the care of your maid," he continued, his cold, steely eyes meeting hers. "She has been used to similar outbreaks, and will know how to treat them."

"What do you mean?" she asked, a strange, cold dread assailing her at his tones.

"I mean, Lady Carlyon, that you are mad, and must, therefore, be put under restraint for a time!" he hissed, bending down till his hot breath touched her cheek.

Alicia uttered a loud shriek, and fell back, half-fainting, at the full significance of the words dawning upon her. In the hands of these two men she was entirely helpless, for they were both utterly unscrupulous, and would hesitate at nothing. Verily, the net was thrown around her, and there was no chance of escape!

CHAPTER XXL

ARLINE LESTER was in her bedroom, busy packing up her boxes ready for her approaching departure, which was to take place the next day, for Hubert had been very anxious to see her settled in a fresh home before he himself left; and Dr. Fletcher had accordingly made arrangements for her to go at once to Mrs. Carroll, who had professed her willingness to receive her.

It was dreary work, going from one stranger's house to another; it made Arline feel her desolate position more keenly than ever, and she was sitting down on the floor, before one of the half-filled trunks, and indulging in a few tears, when Mrs. Bolton entered.

"Crying!" exclaimed the housekeeper (who was almost in the same condition herself). "I wonder what you've got to cry about. You're surely not sorry to get away from this house."

"It is not that exactly, but I am in rather a despondent mood, and things seem so hopeless, somehow. I suppose it is because I'm silly."

"Very likely," responded Mrs. Bolton. "I have observed that girls are never at a loss for something to weep over, and if they haven't a valid excuse they contrive to coin one. However, that's neither here nor there. I suppose you'll write to me sometimes!" she added abruptly.

"Certainly, if you care to hear from me."

"Well, I should like to, 'now and then. I wish with all my heart, I were going to leave, too. Cliff's Court will be very different with Lady De Roubais for its mistress. It was bad enough when she was only a visitor, for her whims and caprices are without number, but what it will be now! it's impossible to guess. However, beggars mustn't be choosers. I suppose, as to my bread and cheese happens to be here, here I must stay. I came to know if I could help you in your packing."

"No, thank you; I have almost finished."

"What time do you start in the morning?"

"Quite early; you know it is a long way to my journey's end, and it seems, from what Dr. Fletcher says, that I shall have to drive some distance after leaving the train. I want to go and wish Lady Carlyon good-bye this afternoon."

"Lady Carlyon!" exclaimed the housekeeper, starting. "I have just heard some very sad news about her; I was going to tell you of it, only other things put it out of my head. You know for a long time past there has been something wrong with her, and no one could exactly make out what it was, for both Sir Ascot and the doctor who attends her, were very close about it, and made it a sort of mystery, but now they can't conceal it any longer. She is mad."

"Mad!" repeated Arline, in utter amazement. Then she burst into an incredulous laugh. "I do not believe it. Who could have told you such a ridiculous story!"

"Ridiculous or not, it is true, for Sir Ascot himself said so. He called this morning to console with Lady De Roubais, or some rubbish of that sort, and I heard the news from his own lips."

"That does not make it any the more ridiculous. Alicia Carlyon mad! Why, her brain was as evenly balanced as that of any woman I know; and unless she has sustained some very great shock, you may depend upon it she is as sane as you or I."

Mrs. Bolton looked dubious. She did not know Lady Carlyon, and was inclined to believe in her husband's assertion.

"He would not make a statement of that kind without having good ground for it," she said: "and, besides, I have heard the fact whispered abroad before—rumours like that generally have some foundation in them."

"Perhaps Sir Ascot himself spread the report!"

The housekeeper seemed surprised at the idea.

"What motive could he have for doing so?"

Arline did not reply—it was not her place to tell what she knew of her friend's private affairs, and without doing so it was impossible to answer Mrs. Bolton's question.

She resolved to go at once to the Chase, and hastily finishing her packing she set off, thinking the while of the last time she had walked the same way—which was when she had met Esther Grant, and been escorted home by Lord Cliffe.

The door was opened to her by a footman, who was more communicative than the butler.

"My lady went away yesterday, miles, with her maid, and Sir Hascot, and Dr. West," he said, in answer to her inquiries. "Another doctor kem down the day before to see her, and he said she must go away from the Chase at once, and have the most perfect quiet, as well as change of air, and as Sir Hascot wouldn't consent to her being taken to a lunatic asylum, she kem gone to be under the care of a doctor who is considered clever in such cases."

Arline was dumbfounded at the promptitude of the proceedings.

"But—but—surely there is no truth in the rumour I have heard, of her having lost her senses?"

"The footman shook his head with that species of melancholy enjoyment some people find under similar circumstances.

"I'm afraid that there can't be no doubt about it, mses," he responded. "You see, for a long time past she's bin rather queer, but Sir Hascot and Dr. West have tried to keep it quiet, thinking she might get better. It was for that reason little Master Douglas was sent away, and Robson, the nurse, came—she had been attendant in a lunatic asylum before she kem here—but last Monday, my lady got quite silent—screamed, and made such a to-do as never was and it was then the second doctor was sent for."

"Do you know where they have taken her to?"

"That I do not, but I'll inquire if you like, mses."

He did so, but the inquiries were futile, for the housekeeper either did not know, or had been instructed not to tell the address, and Arline turned away, baffled.

What to do in the matter she did not know, for it would be worse than useless to attempt to see Sir Ascot, and even if she succeeded in doing so the chances were ten to one the Baronet would meet her inquiries with a request that she should mind her own business.

She had appointed to meet her lover at their old trysting-place, the wood; and when she got there she found him waiting, and told him of her visit to the Chase.

"I saw Sir Ascot myself, this afternoon, and asked him about his wife," said Hubert, "and he told me the physicians held out every hope of recovery if she were kept quite quiet, so he had taken her to a house in the Midlands—he did not say exactly where. I feel the affair as much as you do, but I really can't see that we can do anything in it, for people would naturally say Sir Ascot was competent to manage his own business."

Arline acquiesced, with a sigh, and then they began talking about their own business.

"I shall see you off at the station to-morrow morning, and after that, Heaven knows when we may meet again!" he said, sorrowfully enough. Fate is rather hard to part us just as we have grown to love each other."

"It might have been harder," she whispered, shyly, "for it might have prevented our meeting!"

"In which case we should never have known what we had missed. Love is a strange thing, Arline."

"So strange that it almost amounts to a mystery," she answered, in a voice that was almost solemn. "Have you ever heard the Hindoo tradition, which says that the god Brahma cut a basket of pears in halves, and then mixed them all together, and left it to chance whether the right halves ever got joined? Well, it seems to me, the allegory is a very true one. God makes two human beings, who are formed for each other, in whose souls there are chords that would answer to no one else's touch—two, who in point of fact, make one perfect whole, and whose lives if they had not met, must have been incomplete for ever. It is not often they do meet; the chances are a thousand to one, or even less than

that against it, but sometimes fate brings them together—as it has brought us!"

"And you will not mind separation—distance—the years that may part us?" he asked, as she ceased speaking.

"I shall mind nothing, so long as I have the assurance of your love!"

"And that you need never doubt," he told her, kissing her over and over again. "Whatever may befit, of this at least you may remain certain—that I shall be true to you! It may be I am destined never to call you my wife, but if we met after fifty years' absence, your image would still fill my heart."

"And your fancy would never wander, under the temptation of the many women so much more beautiful than myself, whom you will be sure to see!" half playfully, and yet with a vein of serious earnestness ringing in her voice.

"Never! Don't you understand, dear, that you are the one woman in the world for me? I may admire others, but a man only loves once, however numerous may have been his fancies; and you, who are the ideal of everything that I hold purest and best in womanhood, are also the only one who ever touched my heart. What I should do without you under my present trouble I do not know; for when I feel most inclined to murmur and be depressed, the thought of you comes to cheer me with hopes of the future, and I stills my regrets, and resolve to strive and conquer for your sweet sake!"

"And I, on my part, shall be always thinking of you—always praying for your success. I only wish I could do something to help you!"

"You do something—you do a very great deal, for your influence is ever with me, and you don't know how much that means. I hope, my darling, you will be happy in your new home. I hate the idea of your going among strangers!"

Arlene smiled bravely.

"It will not be so bad, I daresay. Dr. Fletcher says Mrs. Carroll is very kind and nice, and I have no doubt I shall be comfortable enough—I shall try to make myself so, at all events. When do you think of leaving Cliffe?"

"Directly after you are gone. I shall go, first of all to London, and see old Mr. Dailetree, who was the family solicitor some twenty years ago, but who has since retired from business in favour of his son. Perhaps he may be able to tell me something of the motives that induced my father to leave England, and this will give me a clue to work upon. Still, I do not despair of discovering who my mother was—energy and determination will accomplish a good deal, and I shall spare neither."

"Lady de Roubalx has told Mrs. Bolton that she purposes shutting up the Court for three months, and going abroad," observed Arlene; "she has not looked at all well lately, she seems fidgety and restless, and wanders about the house a good deal, as if she were in search of something. I do not think her mind is at ease."

"I wish I knew how much or how little my uncle told her, on the afternoon of his death," exclaimed Hubert. "I suppose you can't tell me how long his interview with her lasted?"

"Mrs. Bolton thinks about half-an-hour, and she says Lady de Roubalx went into Lord Cliffe's room almost directly after you left it."

"I thought it must be so, for if he had waited until his passion cooled he would probably never have told her anything that passed between us. He was not a man fond of talking, as a rule, but Clarke seems to have obtained a good deal of influence over him. I daresay she will not be long before she marries, now that she is alone."

By this time it was growing late, and the slender crescent of the young moon was shining above their heads, looking like a delicate silver boat on an azure sea, and warning Arlene that it was time to get back to the Court. Hubert came with her as far as the plantation, and there they said good-bye—a good-bye that was to be a final one, at least for some time—as this was the last occasion on which they would see each other alone; Mrs. Bolton having announced her intention of accompanying Arlene to the station the following morning, and Dr. Fletcher, having

remarked that he, too, might be there—which was a sign of great favour on his part—for as a rule he was chary of the civilities, to say nothing of the courtesies of life.

And so, near the wood where they first met, they said farewell, and then each went his and her way. Who can say where and under what altered circumstances they may meet again.

CHAPTER XXII.

ARLINE'S journey to her new home was not a pleasant one. It was dull October weather, the skies were low and threatening, and throwing grey shadows over the landscape. There had been a good deal of rain lately, and the ditches were full of muddy water, the rivers swollen and turbulent, the land obscured by a grey mist. Altogether it was an autumn day of the dullest description.

Arlene, sitting in a corner of her second-class compartment—for she had insisted on being economical, and had prevented Hubert from getting her a first-class ticket—thought the weather was in unison with her own spirits, which grew more and more depressed as the distance increased between herself and Cliffe. She tried very hard to look on the bright side of things, and hoped for better days to come; but it was hard work, and at last she broke down altogether, and yielded herself to her grief.

Luckily there was no one else in the carriage at the time, and a good cry did her good.

Afterwards she grew more composed, telling herself that it would never do to present herself before Mrs. Carroll with red eyes, and produce a bad impression on the night of her arrival.

It was evening when she got to her journey's end, and the mist had settled into a steady downpour of rain that blurred the carriage windows and made the station at which she alighted look dim and indistinct, lighted up as it was with dull oil lamps, whose flames were struggling to make themselves visible through the rain-misted glass.

"Ticket, miss, please," said an official in buttons, barring her progress, and Arlene, having delivered it up, looked round helplessly, uncertain what to do. She apparently attracted the attention of a middle-aged, country-looking man, who thereupon came up to her.

"Be you the young woman, aged about twenty, my missus is expecting?" he demanded. "Who is your mistress—Mrs. Carroll?"

"Ees, that's her."

"Very well, then, I am the young woman she is expecting. I suppose you have a conveyance here?"

"Then you had better put my luggage up at once, and let us lose no time in starting."

"Right," was the laconic reply, and Arlene presently found herself in a sort of dog-cart by the side of the man, whom she rightly surmised must be Mrs. Carroll's gardener.

He was not inclined to be communicative, neither did he manifest the slightest interest in his companion, his attention being chiefly directed to his horse, a big-boned quadruped, who kept on a steady jog trot, heedless of the sundry whistles and strange noises made by his driver, apparently with a view of encouraging him.

It was impossible to see what sort of country they were passing as a wall of fog on either side of the road shut out everything beyond; but after a drive of about two miles the man got down and opened a gate, and a few seconds afterwards the dog-cart was pulled up in front of a square brick house, from whose lower windows a pleasant light filtered through the crimson curtains.

A neat maid-servant helped Arlene down, and ushered her into a sitting-room, where a bright fire was blazing, and a cozy tea set out on the table; and then a lady about sixty, rather stout and comfortable looking, with a kindly face and grey hair, rose from an arm-chair, and came forward with outstretched hands.

"My dear, I am very glad to see you, and I hope you will make yourself happy here," she said, shaking hands. "You must be cold, and wet, and tired after your journey. Go up-stairs and take your things off, and then a cup of tea will refresh you."

Arlene was almost taken aback by the kindness of this greeting, for she had been preparing herself for a different kind of reception. She murmured a few words of thanks, then went with the servant to her room, a comfortable little apartment, where a fire had been lighted in expectation of her coming. When she came down again, having changed her wet travelling dress, and put on clean collar and cuffs, she found Mrs. Carroll seated in front of the urn.

"I shall give this place up to you after today," the hostess remarked, with a pleasant smile, as she motioned Arlene to a seat near her. "I am getting old and lazy, and I find the less I do the less I want to. It is different with young people who like exertion and activity. Now, you must help yourself to a cutlet," she continued. "I know you haven't had any dinner, so, of course, you must be hungry."

Arlene did not deny the Impeachment; she had eaten nothing all day, and therefore did justice to the repast before her, which was a very tempting one—home-made bread and butter, fresh laid eggs, jams, marmalades, and the cutlets. Evidently Mrs. Carroll was thoughtful for the comfort of other people.

When they had finished, and the things were cleared away, Mrs. Carroll resumed her seat in the armchair, and took up some knitting.

"Draw up to the fire, Miss Lester, and let us talk a bit," she said, "and then I can set your mind at ease with regard to what is expected of you in the way of duties. For a long time I have lived alone with my two servants, and have been happy enough in my quiet way, for you must know I am no grand lady, but only the widow of a country farmer, and not accustomed to a gay life. I see very few visitors, the country people will not condescend to visit me, and the tenant farmers about here are not exactly my stamp either, so between the two stools I fall to the ground. Still, as long as I could get about and garden, and see that things went straight, I was happy enough; but since my paralytic seizure, although it has not taken away the power from my limbs, I am different to what I used to be—less strong, and more easily knocked up, and I have found it very lonely, for my sight is not particularly good, and I don't strain it by reading. I shall, therefore require you to read to me, and you will also look after the house in the mornings, and walk or drive with me in the afternoons. You are a good walker, I presume!"

"Very good; at least, I don't get tired."

"That's right. I think, my dear," added Mrs. Carroll, bending forward to look into the young girl's eye, "I think, if I may be allowed to judge on so short an acquaintance, that we shall get on very well together."

"Indeed, I hope so!" Arlene exclaimed.

"And I also think you will be a great help and comfort to me. I like young people, although I am old myself. I never had any children," she sighed; "but once a very dear niece lived with me, and took the place of a daughter. She is dead. Poor Daisy!"

She relapsed into silence, and gazed dreamily at the fire, as though she saw pictures of the past in the upleaping flames; and Arlene refrained from disturbing her reverie out of a delicate consideration. Presently she looked up and smiled.

"I am afraid you think me a very foolish old woman, Miss Lester, do you not?"

"Indeed, no."

"There are some words of Longfellow's that I was thinking of, and that described my feelings," added Mrs. Carroll, and with a perfect simplicity she repeated them:

"There are things of which I may not speak,
There are things that cannot die;
There are things that make the strong heart weak,
And bring a pallor in the cheek,
And a mist before the eye."



"I SEE IT ALL. I HAVE BEEN TRICKED, DECEIVED BY BOTH OF YOU!" CRIED LADY CARLTON.

And the words of that beautiful song
Are haunting my memory still,
A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.

"They are beautiful lines, are they not?"
"Very beautiful," Arline responded.

"And they embody my ideas at that particular moment quite accurately. I hope you are fond of poetry, Miss Lester, for I shall want you to read a good deal of it aloud to me. I do not, as is the fashion nowadays, rave over Browning and Swinburne, because I cannot understand them, but I love that grand old American, who never wrote a line but what is stamped with truth and purity, as well as beauty. The New World has reason to be proud of her Longfellow."

Mrs. Carroll was one of nature's own ladies. She had never been to a fashionable boarding school, had never gone into society, and knew nothing of the great world; but for all that you might have searched England through, and failed to discover a more refined woman—not perhaps, in the outward polish that contact with society gives, but in thoughts and actions.

She had read a good deal, too, and Arline found her a most amusing and intelligent companion, while she, on her part, rejoiced in the society of the fair-faced girl, to whom she had taken a fancy on the very night of her arrival. Arline declared, and with truth, that her lines had fallen in very pleasant places; she had nothing menial to do, her time was her own when she wanted it, and the sympathy that existed between herself and her employer very soon ripened into affection.

It was true, as Mrs. Carroll had said, she saw very few visitors, but there was a good garden and greenhouse to wander about in, as well as several very pretty walks in the vicinity, while the library was placed entirely at her disposal—altogether she had every reason to thank Providence and Dr. Fletcher, for having guided her here.

She and Mrs. Carroll often went for drives in the pony chaise, and on one occasion, as they

were returning home by a different route to any they had ever taken before, they passed a high, grey stone wall, in the middle of which were big wooden doors, one of them being open.

"What place is that?" Inquired Arline driving slowly past.

"It is called the Priory, and has been vacant for many years until this summer, when someone was courageous enough to take it, in spite of the evil reputation it had acquired. I don't know who the tenant is."

"It looks gloomy enough from the outside."

"Yes, the gates are closed, as a rule; this is the first time I have ever seen them open—and I declare Fritz has gone inside!"

"Fritz" was the retriever that always ran by the side of the carriage, and whether prompted by motives of curiosity or a suspicion of rabbits cannot be said; but, at any rate, Fritz on this occasion proved himself extremely disobedient and unmanageable, for he refused to listen to his mistress's persuasions, and could be heard from the outside forcing his way through the laurels that formed part of a plantation entirely surrounding the house. Arline called, and Mr. Carroll called, but it was of no avail, and at last the former got out of the carriage, and went in search of the dog.

A narrow path led up between two high walls of shrubs, and on getting to the end of this the house faced you,—about as gloomy-looking a habitation as can well be imagined. It was square, and built of grey stone, that by age and damp had assumed a greenish hue; here and there, where the spouting had given way, were long dark stains arising from the moisture, and it was quite evident that the money expended in repairs—to say nothing of painting or decorating—had been reduced to a minimum. To add to its repellent aspect all the upper windows were barred, and some of them frosted over on the lower panes.

Arline was looking up at the latter, when, to her great astonishment, a hand was pushed between the bars, and a handkerchief waved,

apparently with the idea of attracting her attention. Almost immediately, however, it was withdrawn, and the window closed with a swiftness that nearly amounted to violence, and at that moment Fritz, having satisfied himself that there were no rabbits, came bounding up, wagging his tail as a profession of penitence, and his willingness to return to the paths of virtue.

Arline had no excuse for remaining, and therefore retraced her steps, and got into the carriage again, telling Mrs. Carroll of the incident that had occurred.

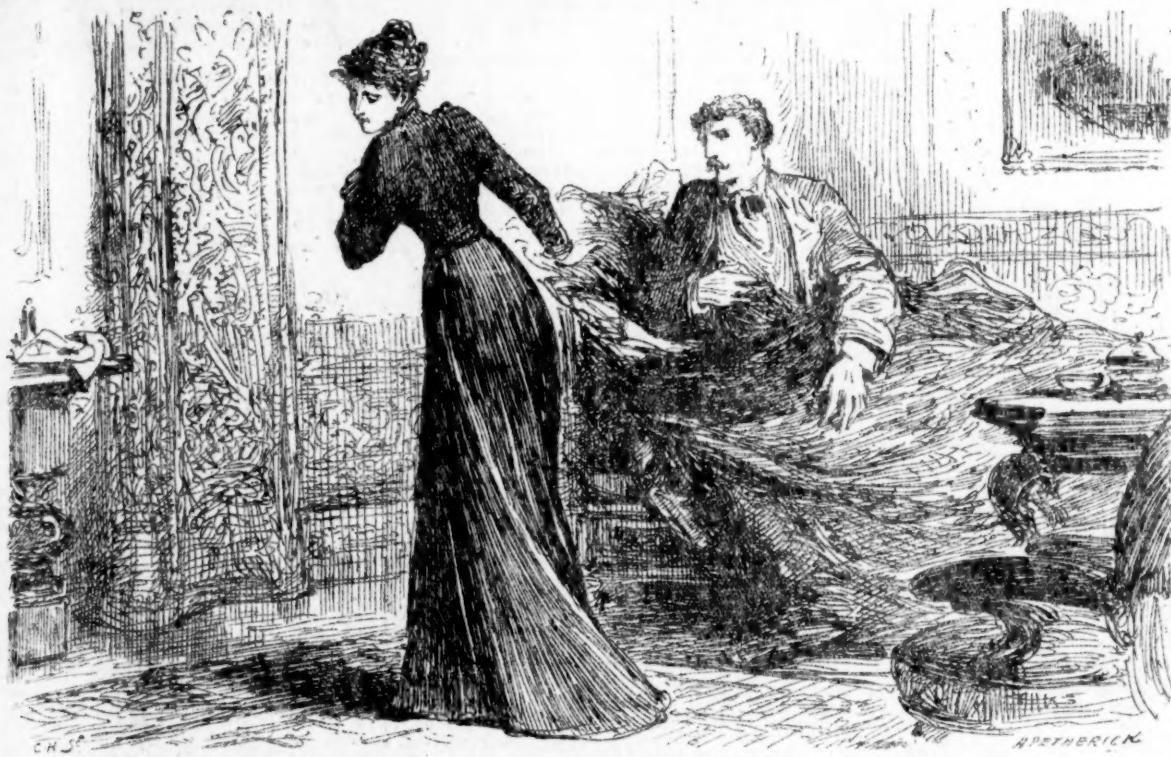
"It is strange," remarked the latter, "perhaps it was some child at play."

"I don't think so. The hand was white and small and delicate, but it belonged to a woman," responded Arline. "What a horrid place to live in! It is desolate enough to drive one mad, and damp enough to kill one."

"It certainly cannot be healthy, for it lies low, and there are marshes all round, to say nothing of the fog to which it is liable. It was for that reason it remained empty so long, I believe; and I never was more surprised than when I heard it was taken, for to a delicate person the situation must mean death. The owner is a gentleman who spends all his time abroad, and leaves the property to be looked after by his London agent, and I suppose they neither of them thought it worth while keeping the place in proper repair. The land all round ought to be drained, in order to make it anything like healthy—at present it must be the very reverse, and ought to be condemned as unfit to be inhabited."

(To be continued.)

THE first skates were made out of the bones of animals. Sometimes children would sit on the jawbones of a horse or cow, and propel themselves along the ice by means of iron staves.



"OH, STOP, STOP!" SHE CRIED; "I'M TO BE MARRIED TO MAJOR LUSHINGTON IN A MONTH'S TIME."

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

—10—

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE GENERAL'S CONSENT.

For many years the weeks that passed, after the receipt of that first telegram, seemed to Sibel like one long nightmare of dread.

She never got up in the morning without being afraid of meeting the news in the paper, and never lay down to rest without fearing what the darkness might bring forth. The sound of the postman's ring made her heart beat to suffocation, and the sight of an orange envelope nearly caused a swoon.

Lord Wentworth bore up bravely; but as the slow days crawled by with lagging steps the long anxiety told upon his failing strength, and the two who lived with him and loved him so dearly, watched him with ever-increasing fear. What if the son should regain his strength, and come back to bid his father not there to meet him! No son or daughter could have been more devoted than they were, but love feels as terribly powerless when struggling against the feebleness of age. The accounts from India improved towards the beginning of August, and their hopes rose.

Hugh never murmured at the sacrifice which had been exacted from him. A hundred times a day he longed to be in the thickest of the fray, marching with the gallant Roberts, through the heat and blinding dust, on to victory, or sitting by Dudley's side, ministering to the numberless wants of an invalid, and bringing him back to health and strength, by the force of his tender care—but he kept it all to himself. When Sibel said, as she often did, "What should we have done without you!" he gave his beautiful smile in return, and felt that he had his reward.

Lady Windsor came often, on purpose to cheer her old friend, bringing with her some rare specimens of floriculture from her hothouse, or the last "good thing," that had gone the round of

the clubs, to interest or amuse him. He was very grateful for her efforts, and brightened up as much as was possible in order to gratify her. She shook her head over Sibel, and declared that she had spoilt her son's career.

"But my dear lady, he knew it was hopeless from the start," he remonstrated gently. "The engagement to Major Lushington was publicly announced."

"So were a good many others, which have been broken off since. My dear boy was so determined that I was sure he would win her, in spite of everything."

"A girl's promise may be stronger than a man's will."

"It's nothing to do with the promise," shaking her head毅然. "I believe it's all the fault of my favourite."

"What, Hugh! impossible. Besides I know she wouldn't have him."

"Wait till she's asked. I don't think anyone would have the heart to refuse him."

"Poor boy, the Macdonalds are not fortunate in their loves," he said dreamily, quite forgetting that the Countess was, to a certain extent, answerable for the misfortune of one at least.

She rose up to go, with strange agitation in her face. "Oh! there are the two culprits," turning towards the window in a hurry. "He is holding her basket, and she has evidently given him that peculiar-looking flower in his button-hole. I am glad that they are just in time to catch me!"

Sibel came in, followed by Macdonald, and was greeted affectionately, though not quite as warmly as when she was expected to be a daughter-in-law.

Hugh shook hands, but without waiting for more walked straight up to Lord Wentworth, and put a telegram in his hand, which he had just fetched with the *Globe* from the station.

The telegram was opened with trembling fingers—after a slight glance of excuse to Lady Windsor. "Read it for me, my eyes fail me."

Hugh took it, and read it in a voice thrilled

with intense emotion: "Better. Coming home on sick leave, shall be with you about the sixteenth of September. Hope you are well."

"Thank Heaven!" said the father, fervently. Hugh looked round with shining eyes, whilst Sibel said nothing, only clung to the back of a chair, as if she were suddenly paralysed in her knees. One look at the girl's face was enough for Lady Windsor. When she got into her carriage she leaned back with a sigh. No wonder that Windsor was unsuccessful when Dudley Wentworth, the idol of London society, had stolen the girl's heart, and taken it away in his pocket.

Dudley Wentworth coming home! The excitement the news caused is better imagined than described. To the weary, care-worn father it brought new life—to Hugh the satisfaction of knowing the happiness it meant for others. To Sibel it was at once a joy and a fear. Her heart seemed as if it would bound from her breast at the thought of hearing his voice, or touching his hand once more; but she knew the pleasure would bring with it its stab of pain; and however sweet the flowers of love might be, there was a gulf between her and their brightest bloom. Other hands might pick them, but she must for ever let them be, unless she wanted to fall into that yawning gulf, from which there was no redemption. He was on one side, and she the other; any by her own folly, and her fidelity to Phil, she had broken the bridge which might have brought them together.

Meanwhile Mrs. Forrester was thinking; "When Dudley comes home—that will be the time for them to invite Judith." And Judith unbent from her cold stateliness to ask a few questions about "The Chestnut," such as she had never deigned to ask before.

Phil laughed in his sleeve, when Rose wrote and told him the news. "Won't Judy be precious sorry she didn't play her cards better. The old gentleman wouldn't have her at any price. After so mean as not to send a message to Sibel. Of course Hugh told him, for he was in no end of a wax himself! Ha! Ha!"

Major Lushington chanced to see Wentworth's name amongst the list of passengers upon the *Tamar*, and scented danger from afar.

"Once let them live under the same roof together, and I'm done for!" he said to himself, and with a peculiar smile on his face, sat down and wrote a letter to General Forrester. The letter was diplomatic to the last degree, and couched in such respectful terms that the General was quite flattered by it. He took it to his wife, and had a consultation over it. Perhaps it did seem hard to keep the poor fellow waiting so long; and if Sibel had really made up her mind to have him, there was no particular advantage in deferring it till she was of age. Neither said to the other, in plain terms, that they were anxious to get her out of the way before Dudley Wentworth came back, but each understood it; and Mrs. Forrester, who was a devoted mother, said, with a sigh of satisfaction,—

"Then Judith can take her proper place."

"Of course that will be the natural consequence, but not a word to her or to anyone else at present. Wentworth is getting crotchety in his old age, and I don't know what ideas he may take into his head. He might think I wanted to get the girl off my hands—there's no knowing."

"No knowing, indeed, he seems to have a craze about her!"

"Sending me that message by Rose," his grey moustaches bristling with anger. "I should call her a firebrand rather than a sunbeam."

"Pall declares that Sibel had an offer from the Earl of Windsor," said Mrs. Forrester, thoughtfully.

"By George! she must be fonder of Lushington than I ever gave her the credit for, if she refused to be a Countess."

"But, my dear, you forgot her engagement."

"She had ample excuse for slipping out of it."

"I thought you said there was no reason against it!" opening her eyes in surprise.

"No reason!" very testily, for his conscience pricked him; "but plenty of excuse."

"I always said she was too good to be thrown away upon that dissipated man," with a heavy sigh.

"Too good, pahaw! I always thought it was a mercy he would take her. Really, my dear Emmaus, I don't know what has come to you to-day!"

Pall says that Hugh is devoted to her, and every man who comes near her. When I think of her marrying Major Lushington, that line of words runs in my head 'So young and so fair,' just as if she were a victim whom we were sacrificing to please ourselves. But it is not so, is it?" looking up into her husband's stern face, with a troubled expression on her own.

"Gracious goodness! is your memory quite gone!" bouncing up from his chair. "Do you mean to say you have quite forgotten the shameless manner in which she threw herself at his head? Bless my soul! and then to accuse me of sacrificing her, when it was I—I who held out against both of them as long as I could, and only gave in for the sake of the girl's good name."

"Of course, of course!" with a feeble sigh.

"Then why do you say the other thing?" glaring at his wife, as if he would like to eat her.

Mrs. Forrester ventured no response, and he sat down by the writing-table. His pen went rapidly for a quarter of an hour without stopping, when he threw it down with a grunt of satisfaction.

"I've settled that; and now I suppose I had better drop a line to Mr. Fortescue!"

"Who's Mr. Fortescue?"

The Fitzgeralds' solicitor. He had better put himself in communication with Lushington's man of business, so that there need be no delay with the law-papers—he put his pen down, and remained lost in thought. "It was a strange thing her asking for that two hundred pounds; but I suppose, living in a lord's house, she thought she had a right to be extravagant, or do you think it had anything to do with her troussau?"

"It couldn't be that."

"I suppose she will want something more; though she can't have spent it."

"Certainly. Gay would wish her to have everything very nice."

"I daresay he would. But where's the money to come from?"

"You said that the mortgage on the estate was nearly paid off. And then they will both have a very handsome income."

"Just like a woman! Future contingencies are very different to present realities. However, I must see what can be done," and he went off, with a self-righteous air, as if he had been doing a good work.

CHAPTER XLIV.

DUDLEY!

EVERTHING was ready for the reception of the wounded Hussar. An extra sofa had been wheeled into the library; and the breakfast-room was turned into a bedroom, in order that he might be spared the trouble of going upstairs. Nothing was forgotten that could conduces to his comfort. Cloaks and hats were turned out of a small room beyond, and a bed put in the place of a hat-stand, so that Minton might be always within call.

Sibel looked round the room, then gave a little nod of satisfaction; for the most fastidious taste could scarcely have found fault with it. There was nothing more to be done except to fill the vase with flowers, and that was a task to be left for the morrow. She tripped into the library with a happy smile. Come what would, she could not help enjoying the thought of seeing Dudley once again. What a mercy—that there were no snowdrops in September to remind him of their last parting in the spring.

"It looks very nice, doesn't it, my dear?" said Lord Wentworth, cheerfully, as he held out his thin hands towards the crackling logs in the grate. It was a mild day; but he liked to have a fire and an open window. "I don't think we have forgotten anything. I ordered in plenty of salver and apothecaries, as he had a fancy for them; and I asked Seymour to give us a look round in the morning, in case the journey should have done him any harm."

"But you don't think it will?"

"I hope not; but those sword-cuts are ticklish things—likely to break out after any unusual exertion."

Sibel gave a little shiver, and took up a book.

"Shall I read to you again?"

"If you will, my dear. I should enjoy it."

"Remember, if you feel inclined to go to sleep I shan't be least bit offended."

"But I haven't the slightest intention." Nevertheless, after the lapse of half-an-hour the white head began to droop suspiciously, and Sibel with a smile laid down her book and prepared to dream with open eyes. To-morrow, about this time, Dudley would be there, perhaps resting on the crimson sofa, his fair head resting on the velvet. How would they meet! Perhaps he would have forgotten all his anger and contempt, and held out his hand with a friendly smile of old, and then—and then—a soft smile hovering round her lips—perhaps somebody would find out the truth about Major Lushington, and Guy or Lord Wentworth would insist upon breaking off the match. Her thoughts stopped still, afraid of going any further; but there was a delicious flutter at her heart; and her head sank down on her hand.

Manser came in with the afternoon post. She did not expect a letter, so scarcely looked till he came and stood straight before her, holding out the silver walter.

"A letter from Canada!" Oh, with what a sudden jump her heart went down—down to her very shoes. She left it on her lap for a few minutes, not daring to open it; but after a while she told herself that it must be done, and tore the envelope, with hasty finger, from one end to the other. She read it slowly at first, and then in breathless haste, as its purport dawned upon her. He reminded her of her promise to marry him as soon as the General would give his consent, and

informed her that the consent had already been given. He had written to his own lawyers to draw up the necessary documents without delay, and Forrester told him he had done the same by Mr. Fortescue.

"So, now, dearest, every obstacle is cleared away; and I want to know if you will make me the happiest of men on the 13th October, just a month from the day you will get this letter! Surely, twenty-four days will be enough for the wedding-toggery, and all that sort of thing. I have waited with the patience of a second Jacob, and I can't stand it any longer. Telegraph you, and I'll be with you as soon as possible, darling. I can hardly sleep for joy.—Your own

"HAROLD LUSHINGTON.

"Artillery Barracks."

The letter fell down on the floor, and she stretched out her hand with a bitter groan. Such a moment for the blow to fall, just when new hopes were rising. Oh, it was cruel, too cruel! Her own hateful promise, wrung from her in a moment when her gentlest feelings were stirred by compassion, was it to be the curse of her life! She looked at Lord Wentworth—he was sleeping quietly with one thin hand drooping over the arm of his chair—utterly unconscious of the torture she was enduring only a few feet from him. She longed for Hugh; but he was speeding on his way to Southampton, and she must do without his counsel or sympathy; it never failed her, and she missed it sorely. All that day she kept her trouble to herself, fearing that it would be wrong to worry Lord Wentworth about anything at a time when he wanted all his strength for the welcoming home of his son. The next she went about like a ghost, and even the servants wondered what had come over her. Mrs. Upperton ventured to opine that she was suffering from "the headache"; but Sibel shook her dainty head with a smile, and remarked that she had not slept very well the night before.

"Just the same as I was took myself, miss," said the housekeeper. "In the middle of the night I kept fancying that there was a bell, and Mr. Dudley had come."

"Captain, you must say now!" with a slight smile.

"Ahl yes, miss, to be sure. Captain the Honourable Dudley Wentworth! It don't sound bad, do it! We shall have him marrying before we know what we are about, and, please Heaven, he'll choose some young lady whom his lordship will take to. The divided households never get along."

Sibel gave a hasty nod, and escaped to her own room. "A young lady whom his lordship would take to!" Could that be anyone else but herself—the girl whom he loved like a daughter! She leant her elbows on the table, her sad face on her hands, trying to make up her mind on the most important issue of her life.

Should she send that telegram to Canada or no? Better, perhaps, he pledged—irrevocably pledged—before Dudley came. Then the temptation might be too much for her strength. Now she saw her duty, and could scrape together sufficient courage to do it. General Forrester she believed to be an honourable, straightforward man, and he had given his full consent to her marriage; therefore there could be no truth in the stories against Major Lushington. Naturally prejudiced as he was against him, he would have sifted the matter to the very bottom, and been only too glad to discard him on the first protest; instead of which he had evidently changed his opinion entirely, and allowed the marriage to take place several months before she was of age.

Major Lushington had come forward in the hour of her trouble, and she had given him her promise in return. By no sophistry could she find an excuse for retreat. To-morrow might be ten times more difficult than to-day, and if she were bound to do it in the end, delay was only likely to make it worse.

Poor little thing! so young and impulsive—debarred from asking the advice of the only person who could have helped her—by her own generous fear lest she should worry his mind!

She determined to do her duty with the courage of a soldier's daughter; and without waiting for anything, put on her hat and hurried across the fields to the station, lest her resolution might fail her.

There were plenty to blame her afterwards, but at the moment she was simply—with utter unselfishness—striving to do what she thought to be right, and as that is not too common a course of action amongst frail humanity, censure ought to have been leavened with a good deal of praise. Her excitement having passed she walked back, with a slow and laggard step. She heard the whistle of a train, but did not hurry her pace, for it was now only half-past five, and the travellers were not expected till a quarter to seven.

The autumn leaves glowed brightly in the level rays of the September sun, and under any other circumstances the girl's heart would have bounded at the sight of the beauty in hedge-row and field. But she noticed nothing as she walked over the shining grass on which the morning dew-drops still lingered in the shade.

She let herself in at the gate, at the bottom of the lawn, and came slowly towards the library window, wondering rather that it should have been left open so late as this; for Lord Wentworth was generally chilly. Apparently the same thought had struck somebody else, for an arm was stretched out to close the French doors, but stopped suddenly, and Hugh stepped out onto the ground, crying out, "Why, here you are, Sibyl. We couldn't conceive what had become of you!"

Then she knew Dudley had come, and her knees knocked together.

She never knew how she got into the room, but she found herself standing by what looked like a long heap of rugs on the sofa, and the eyes which had haunted her dreams were looking into hers with more than all their old tenderness in their beautiful depths. She sank down on her knees because she was afraid of falling, utterly overcome and bewildered, to find that his coldness and restraint had gone.

He was haggard, and worn, and wan, with bloodless lips, and sunken cheeks, and her heart went out to him on a wave of almost uncontrollable tenderness. He saw her agitation and smiled. No other man but he could stir her thus of old, and it was joy to find that he could do it still. He bent his head and kissed the little hands he was holding so tight, and murmured, brokenly, "My own little Belle."

Then it rushed across her, that the gates of an earthly Paradise were opening for her at last, and as the flush of delirious joy dazzled her eyes, she saw what she might have had, only when it was too late. With a little smothered groan her head dropped upon his breast, and the next moment Hugh's strong arms had lifted her from the ground like a child, and carried her to a sofa at the other end of the room.

CHAPTER XLV.

"DO YOU REMEMBER ME, BELLE?"

"DON'T go!"

It was about twelve o'clock the following morning. Hugh had gone to the stables to see after one of the horses which was said to need a "rest." Lord Wentworth was shut up in the study with Mr. Bryant, and Dudley was lying full length on the sofa, his head supported by manifold cushions, his long legs covered by an Indian rug. Sibyl having arranged everything for his comfort was about to slip out of the room, when he uttered his protest. She turned as he spoke, but did not move, her heart beating fast as she felt the impossibility of disobeying that low sweet voice.

"Come here!" he went on, with the quiet imperativeness of a man accustomed to having his own way. "I want to have a talk with you—it is such ages since I have."

"I have a letter to write," still halting near the door.

"I fancy the letter might be postponed!" with a smile. "Come here, little Belle, you

don't know often I've lounged to see your small face out there. Pull your chair quite close or else I shall think you are meaning to run away!" She obeyed him, for how could she help it? But surely the coldness of former days would be less trying than this fatal tenderness!

"You have the prettiest hair that mortal ever had!" his eyes dwelling lovingly on her soft, bright curls. "May I touch it, just as I did one day—such centuries ago?" laying his wasted hand on her dainty head. "Do you remember it, Belle? I met you in the road, and you cried and let me comfort you!" Lower and lower her head drooped, and her cheeks turned white as death. "You had little pink cheeks then, and you didn't frown when I spoke to you. I was conceited enough to think that you liked me, or else I shouldn't have dared—"

"Oh, don't, don't!" raising her clasped hands, with a gesture of agony. "I thought you had forgotten it—you said you would."

"I said I wished I could!" his face growing grave, "but that is very different. I couldn't get it out of my thoughts, struggle as much as I would; and the day that I got this," looking at his bandaged arm, "you know they left me for dead. So no one came near me, and all round were stiffening corpses, with ghastly eyes that seemed to watch me. At first I was mad with thirst, and longed for death just to put me out of my misery; and then I grew delirious—so delirious that I thought you came to me—the thousands of miles couldn't keep you; nothing could—not even the dead horses, or the bodies of the Afghans. You came over them looking neither to right nor left, and then when you found me—oh, Heaven! such a smile you wore!" his pale lips trembling, "and you put your white arms round me—your lips to mine!" hoarsely, "and all was well!"

Her tears fell down into her lap, but she did not dare either to look or speak.

"Days afterwards I woke up in a hospital tent, with Dr. Browne's bearded face bending over me instead of yours. They asked me what I was looking for? when my eyes wandered from side to side, and I told them that they had frightened you away; and I wanted you, and nothing else. They promised to go and fetch you, and I believed them, and let them do what they liked with me, because I thought you were coming; but you never came, and as I got better," with a sigh, "I knew you never would. Child, have you nothing to say to me?" raising his head, and trying to catch a glimpse of her downcast face. "Were you glad to think I was on my way home?"

A sob rose in her throat, and nearly choked her, as her heart felt as if it would really burst. Oh! if she could only be deaf to his words and tones, or free as she was when they kissed and parted at the gate! The torture was almost more than she could bear.

"Look at me, dear!" in that low tone which was so utterly irresistible. "I have been in the house for eighteen hours or more, and I have scarcely seen the colour of your eyes. Are those long lashes gummed down to your cheeks?"

His voice sounded so dangerously near that she gave one upward, startled glance into his face.

"Tears!" he exclaimed, in dismay, "my little one, have I made you cry?"

In a moment his arm was round her neck, her face drawn close to his.

"Oh, Heaven!" she gasped, trying to free herself; but ever so gently, because in her misery she yet had some thought for his bandaged side.

"Have I vexed you, child? Listen, I want to tell you——" in the softest of whispers, whilst his breath fanned her cheek.

"No, no, no!" breaking away from him, and springing to her feet.

He laid a detaining hand on her dress. "You must hear me! there shall be nothing between us now. If you had only told me long ago——"

"Nothing! Oh, Heaven! you don't know; tugging at her dress, with all her might.

He released it because all his strength had gone from him when he nearly bled to death, forgotten amongst the slain, and he could not

hold it against her vigour. "Yes, I know!" with a smile of quiet happiness, lighting up his wearied face. "Hugh has told me! It was no fault of yours. You were entrapped into an engagement, and—and, you never forgot me!"

She stood quite still, stricken dumb by the fear of what was coming—yet unable to move. Oh! if she could only be dead—dead as so many others were, who, unlike her, had clung to life, and been so sorry to lose it.

"And now, my own darling, as soon as I am strong enough to get about—if you are not afraid of poverty, I will tell you what we will do. No one shall prevent us—let them shake their heads off if they like—and we'll just step down to Thornfield Church——"

"Oh, stop, stop!" Her voice had come back to her at last, though hoarse as a raven's, and she held out her hand in a wild appeal. "I'm to be married to Major Lubington in a month's time!" She gave him one glance—saw the light and the happiness go out of the face that she loved better than anything else on earth; and then she ran out of the room, and sped up the stairs, passing Hugh in her breathless haste, and never seeing him. Alone in her boudoir, she flung herself face downwards on the sofa, and gasped dry, tearless sob of agony, while her small white teeth fastened in the edge of the cushion, and bit it through. Was she going mad? Her brain seemed to totter on the very verge of insanity. Hideous thoughts of suicide came into her head—death in the pond where the water-lilies grew, with the cool water above her burning forehead, and her tortured heart at rest—death on the sofa, there where she lay already—an overdose of chloroform, it would be so easily done. She had a bottle in the room close by—a little phial which somebody had given her when her tooth ached—just to drink it down, and then to have nothing but a dreamless sleep, and an awakening in Heaven.

In Heaven! that was the thought that staggered her. Would she ever find herself in Heaven? if she rushed through the portal of the grave, without a call from Heaven! Then she lay still and shivered, awed into sudden calm by dismay at her own thoughts. The sunshine poured in through the open window, and a bee came and buzzed over some flowers in a vase on the table. Down in the garden below the roller was making its monotonous way over the gravel paths, and a thrush came and sat on a rose bush, trying to find the same full-throated song, as he had poured forth to meet the first breath of spring.

Sibyl listened to its efforts with a bitter smile. The bird's song had gone like her own happiness, and soon the roses would fade, like her hopes, and the garden would be sunless and bare like her own heart, robbed of its joy. All was going from her, and nothing would be left but duty. Duty has two different sides to her face—one most often seen is cold and stern like that of a Fate, the other of which few catch a glimpse till their pilgrimage is nearly over, wears the smile of an angel. It was the first which made the poor girl shiver with dismay, as it pointed with bony finger along the stony path which led onward through the wilderness, with love and hope and sunshine left behind.

Time passed, but she took no count of it. The house was solidly built, so there came no sound to her ears of the movement and bustle downstairs. It was past two o'clock when the housemaid knocked at the door, and said that luncheon was ready. She seemed inclined to stay, when Sibyl said she had a headache and could not come down; but as she received no encouragement, but rather the reverse, she closed the door softly and went away.

About an hour later Hugh came in, and going up to the sofa, asked her how she was, with a new anxiety in his face.

"Oh, I don't know. Better, I suppose."

"Dr. Seymour has been here."

"Yes," raising herself up, and pushing back her ruffled hair.

"He has ordered Dudley straight back to bed, and says we ought never to have let him get up."

"Does he think him very bad?" in a tremulous voice.

"I'm afraid so"—very gravely. "He felt his pulse, and said it was galloping. His brain seemed in such an excited state that he asked if he had received any shock since his arrival. We are to keep him as quiet as possible, as the consequences may be serious."

Sibel sighed, but said nothing.

"When I left him this morning to go to the stables, he was quite bright and jolly—terribly weak, of course, but that we expected. I can't help thinking that you had something to do with it," lowering his voice and his eyes as well.

There was a slight pause, and then she looked up at him, and held out her hands appealingly.

"Oh, Hugh, help me!"

He sat down by her side, and listened with a long face while she told him everything.

He did not call out or exclaim when her story was ended, but he pressed his lips together, and a look of grave resolution came into his face which made him look years older than he really was.

"Uncle must be told at once."

"Do you think so?" with a startled glance.

"Undoubtedly! Look here Sibel"—after a pause, during which he seemed lost in thought—"If I prove to you that Lushington is an out-and-out scoundrel, should you think that sufficient reason for breaking your engagement?"

"Yes," her face crimsoning. "But you can't."

"I am not so sure of that," rising as if anxious to set about something at once, "Now come downstairs, and have a glass of wine and a bit of chicken. Remember, you have to fortify yourself for your duties."

"My duties!" with a look of surprise.

"Yes. You are the only lady in the house, so the care of the invalid—that is to say his amusement—depends upon you. You have the softest voice possible, so you will have to read to him."

"I couldn't," with a frown of pain.

"But you must!" with quiet decision. "Surely you can put your feelings in your pocket in order to speed his recovery! Wasn't he doing it himself at every hour of the day for the good of another."

"You don't understand women!"

"Perhaps not," with a half smile; "but I understand Dudley, and know what he wants. Come with me."

(To be continued.)

JACK AMHERST, HERO.

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(Continued from page 297.)

The next moment he was gone, and then Nathaniel remembered the circumstance when Gregory declared Captain Amherst it was who emerged from the widow's cottage. Yes! he had gone there, as Joe afterwards confessed, in the hopes that he might be able to take his share in that night's work; but fortunately for himself he was not, and so escaped the punishment which the others received; for they were shortly after apprehended through the exertions of Westwood, who said he never felt so proud in his life as when he appeared against those men.

Once more the *Mermaid* has unfurled her sails, and the Rector feels it is time he should take his usual holiday. He would feign not have gone near where the slopes of the Priory touched the river's edge; all connected with it was so wrought with mingled feelings of pain and pleasure that the very sight of its walls would arouse a latent hope within his breast.

"But that will never be," he mentally exclaimed, when suddenly raising his eyes, there near to his own little craft was a tiny boat, in which a boy and girl were seated, and a voice he could not mistake rang out in the summer air. It was Dick's.

"We won't run you down this year, Mr.

Wardroper, if you will promise to come to the Priory," he said. "Sir Henry sent us for the identical purpose of asking you, so you must not refuse. My uncle, having espied the white sails and blue pennant of the *Mermaid* in the distance, has made up his mind to your company, and he will be terrible if he is crossed" (with a comical expression of countenance).

But Nathaniel did not answer for the moment, looking only at Nesta, and not until she raised her eyes to his, asking him also, did he consent.

It was a lovely evening! The cruel east winds of the previous fortnight had fled, leaving a soft breeze gentle as July in its stead, and the sun was sinking to rest behind a bank of clouds, purple and red, with deep gold edges, when they landed on the soft, green grass of the Priory grounds.

Nesta had taken the Rector's arm, Dick walking by the side, while they crossed the smooth, broad lawn.

"At first I could scarcely think it true," she was saying, addressing Nathaniel, "until amongst Jack's belongings, which were sent here by Lord Glenore, was a small leather case, and, when it was opened, what should be inside but the identical diamond cross stolen on the night the Priory was broken into!"

But Dick at the moment suddenly falling over the root of a tree projecting from the ground, there was no comment made on it until later on, when alone with Nathaniel she referred to the subject.

"I have been wanting to see you so long," she said, as they stood in the window looking out on the wide expanse of wooded green. "I treated you so badly, Mr. Wardroper, and although I have been sorely punished (for I know all now), I should feel happier if you forgave me."

But he made no answer, only lifting the hand she had placed in his to his lips, and then for the first time since their eyes met, and in the growing twilight he gathered her to his bosom.

"Mine, darling, only mine!" he whispered, his hand the while passing lovingly over her golden hair, and the moonbeams making a halo of light around her.

Sir Henry Muscaver appeared to take an interest in his daughter's affairs for the first time in her life, evincing great pleasure at the turn affairs had taken, and assuring the Rector that it was he whom he would have chosen for a son-in-law long since; but what was the use of giving advice to young people, who invariably thought they knew best; whilst Mademoiselle, alone, remained true to the memory of Jack, declaring he was the most beautiful man she had ever seen.

But ten years have passed since then, and she is still with the Nests to whom she was more than mother, the while her memory is taken back to the days long past, as she nestles close to her bosom another little Nesta, whose tiny hands encircle her neck, wandering to where the once black hair is now white as snow; and for the twentieth time she relates in her broken English the story of Jack and the beanstalk—little Dick, the older of the two, looking up to her face from the stool on which he is seated at her feet, weighing in his infant mind the truth and fiction of that wonderful story.

[THE END.]

THE antipathy of animals for certain things is unexplainable; but the fact remains, for example, that rattlesnakes have a decided dislike for the leaves of the white ash. Experiments have shown that they would rather run over live coals than touch white ash leaves.

The largest leaves are to be found on trees of the palm family. The leaves of the double coconut palm are often thirty feet long and several feet wide; only one leaf is produced each year, and they are so strong and so firmly attached to the stem that a man may sit on the end of one and rock to and fro in perfect safety.

ALL AMONG THE HEATHER.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE BELLE OF THE BALL.

"How do I look? Be candid, and tell me what you really think."

So spoke Charlie Birch, as she stands surveying her own fair reflection in the pier-glass, and in the glass door of the wardrobe in her own room.

She is dressed for the ball at Trevelyan Court, and she secretly believes that she never looked so well nor half so handsome as she does to-night.

The dresses were made in the newest fashion, and with wonderful taste; and Elsie's sweet, flower-like face, with her large dark, deeply fringed eyes, and her rich, golden hair, which she wore as simply as its natural inclination to wave and curl would permit, looked so exquisitely beautiful that, despite Charlie's generosity of character, and her good opinion of herself, it was impossible for her not to feel a pang of jealous envy as she looked at her friend. Perhaps she reflected that Harry Kingwood would be among the guests, and that he might be quite blind to her own attractions in the presence of this formidable rival.

She was not pleased with Kingwood.

He had been at Trevelyan Court several days, and had not once called at Monkshill, and Charlie was indignant at what she considered his neglect.

But she would not breathe a word of this to Elsie, for that young lady seemed always averse to discuss this young man, and she invariably took the first opportunity of changing the subject of conversation when his name dropped up.

This disinclination to talk about him might be read two ways, and Charlie alternately tormented herself with jealous doubts, and then drove them from her mind, and indulged in such a flow of high spirits that a reaction was bound to set in.

Elsie wondered at the changes that came over her friend, and she felt not a little troubled at the variable temper which became a natural consequence. Had she known the secret of this unrest she could very easily have satisfied Charlie, so far as she herself was concerned; but there can be no doubt that Miss Birch would have considerably sunk in her estimation if matters had come to this crisis.

And Charlie knew this instinctively, and she shrank from exposing her weakness to one who would have but little sympathy with a sister woman—who so soon cried out with pain.

The judgment of youth is always severe. It is as we grow older that we make more allowance for others, knowing as we do that, if our own hearts were laid bare, how much consideration and even pity we should need ourselves.

Elsie's notions of honour, and of maidenly modesty and dignity, were strict to the last degree.

She liked to be well dressed, and to feel that people were pleased to look at her, but she would have felt exceedingly indignant if it had been suggested she had any design upon the heart of any man; because such a design, she believed, would be unworthy of herself.

"I shall never marry," she used to say to herself, bitterly, "never! Who would marry a nameless girl—without a pedigree, without even a family that was decently respectable! And if any man would make such a sacrifice for me, I would not accept it at his hands. My birth is wrapped in mystery—a mystery that can never be cleared up; and even my dear guardian, if he were free and if he loved me, could not persuade me to bring possible shame and disgrace upon his name."

Then she would smile sadly at the bare idea of Lionel Denison seeking to win her, but she always dismissed the subject with a sigh, for the

prospect of a solitary life was gloomy for one so young.

She was thinking a good deal of this as she and her companions drove through the dark country roads to Trevelyan Court.

They were all of them silent.

Mrs. Ridgeway was hoping she would not catch cold in coming home, and was wondering how and where the supper would be laid out, and who would take her down to it; and Charlie's mind was full of Harry Kingswood, to the exclusion of everything and everybody else.

The consciousness of being an heiress rather spoilt Charlie. It gave her a certain air of masterfulness and maturity that made her look older than she really was, and to-night, also, she had put on some family jewels that were very beautiful, no doubt, but that were not suitable for one who was unmarried, and only three-and-twenty.

Mrs. Ridgeway thought this, but she did not venture to say so, and thus Miss Birch came to this ball, looking fully five years older than her real age.

Lady Trevelyan received the party graciously, but she was particularly struck with Elsie, and her eyes followed the girl as she and her friends passed on to make room for other arrivals.

Later on, Lady Trevelyan went to look for the girl whose face had made such an impression upon her, and she was not surprised to find that her own son, in honour of whose majority these festivities were being held, was talking to this young lady, having evidently just danced with her.

"She is an exceptionally pretty girl," she thought, "but I don't want Carhays to fall in love with her, and that is what he seems to be doing as fast as he can. I wonder who she is!"

Thus thinking, her ladyship looked about for information, and seeing one of the gentlemen who was staying in the house at the time, she asked carelessly,

"Mr. Denison, do you know that young lady to whom my son is speaking?"

Thus addressed, Lionel Denison turned and looked at the girl, whom he had not hitherto observed.

A strange sensation came over him. It seemed as though some invisible hand were thumping at his heart, demanding immediate attention.

Yet it was not recognition. Something in the face was familiar to him.

A glance, a feature, the colour of the eyes, seemed to suggest a memory to his mind, but a memory of what or of whom was more than he could tell.

But no suspicion of Elsie's real identity occurred to him.

It takes a very long time to divest a mind of a first impression, and Lionel Denison thought of his lost ward rather as the ragged, dirty little child, with wonderful eyes and golden hair, whom he had found by the side of a dead woman, half buried in the heather on the Shirley Hills, than of the girl, budding into womanhood, who, with reckless self-sacrifice, and from a mistaken idea that it was for his happiness, had left the shelter of his roof to wander, neither of them knew whither.

Of course he knew that Elsie was grown up into a beautiful girl—her portraits had told him this—but the photograph he possessed did not convey the colour or expression of the original; and even had it done so more closely than was the case he would still have failed to recognise the girl he had so vainly sought in the lovely and elegantly dressed young lady to whom Lord Carhays was paying marked attention.

A great desire to know this beautiful creature took possession of him, and he answered Lady Trevelyan's question promptly,

"No, I don't know her, but I should very much like to do so. What is her name?"

"Really, I don't know—I forgot her name. No, I remember it now," said her ladyship, who was troubled with a bad memory. "It is Heath—Miss Heath. She came with Miss

Birch, that lady who is standing by Mr. Kingswood."

"Is that Miss Birch of Monkhill?" asked Mr. Denison, curiously.

He had heard Kingswood speak of Charlie as a heiress, whom it would be a very good thing for him to marry, and he was rather interested in what he had heard of her.

"Yes, that is Miss Birch of Monkhill, and Miss Heath is staying with her," was the answer. "Who she is I don't know in the least; but if you wish to know her I will introduce you."

"Thank you," he replied.

And Lady Trevelyan, by no means sorry to interrupt her son's *élite à élite* with the girl whom he afterwards declared to be the most beautiful in the whole company, led Mr. Denison to where the young couple stood, half hidden by the foliage of some beautiful exotic, and she said sweetly,

"Miss Heath, Mr. Denison desires the honour of your hand for a dance."

Elsie started like a frightened fawn.

Her face became very pale, her head seemed to swim, and her limbs to tremble; but she had sufficient presence of mind to bow, and murmur something that was as indistinct as it was unintelligible.

"He has found me out," was the thought that was uttermost in her mind; "and he may be very angry with me. I wonder if he is!"

Then she hoped that Lord Carhays and his mother would leave them, so that she might justify herself to Lionel, even before he reproached her.

But Lord Carhays had no idea of being "shunted," to use his own expression, in this manner, and he said coolly,—

"Miss Heath is engaged to me for the next dance."

"Then may I be permitted to have the dance after that—or the one after that again?" asked Lionel Denison, with grave courtesy.

His voice was so melodious, and it exercised such a charm upon Elsie, that she took courage, lifted her head, and met his eyes.

There was no recognition in them.

He spoke to her as a gentleman speaks to a lady whom he greatly admires, but with whom he has but the very slightest possible acquaintance.

She experienced a sense of relief, but one likewise of keen disappointment.

Wherever they had met she would have recognised him—would have known him at a glance without hearing his name—while he, though evidently attracted to her, regarded her as having hitherto been a stranger.

"No doubt it is better so," she thought, after the first pang was over; and she smiled, and gave him her card, leaving him to engage her for as many dances as he liked.

Lord Carhays had said nothing previously about the dance he now claimed, but she did not say so; and he, finding that his mother and Denison did not leave them, offered Elsie his arm, and led her off to the ball-room.

The dance was half over when they began, and Carhays would, when she stopped, have found some quiet corner where he could continue the flirtation that might easily become something so very much more serious, when, to his annoyance, he found his mother and Lionel Denison again by his side. They were not alone either.

The wife and daughter of a county magnate were with them, and it was evident, to the much-pestered heir of the Trevelyans, that he was expected to dance with Miss Chamberlain.

There was no help for him; his exceptional position demanded some sacrifice, and after bestowing upon Elsie such an ardent look as to bring the colour to that young lady's cheek, he resigned her to Mr. Denison, and was carried off by his mother in triumph.

Lionel gave Elsie his arm, and she, with a singular feeling of its protecting power, took it, and leaned upon it as they slowly walked through the conservatories.

They talked a little—they were not like

strangers; but what they said was certainly not sufficient to account for the blissful contentment that came over our heroine, nor for the very tumultuous emotions which swelled Lionel Denison's heart, the like of which he had not felt for the last fifteen years.

"Nay, never before," he would have said, had he been asked.

But people forget these things after the lapse of time, and he was quite sincere in believing that he had never known the power of love until he looked into this fair girl's eyes, and saw, or thought that he saw, some of his own deep feeling reflected therein.

It was not to be supposed, however, that Lionel Denison would be allowed to keep the belle of the ball to himself for any length of time, even though she were willing to stay with him.

Arthur Carew came up and claimed a dance that had been promised him, and when it was over he would not leave her, even though Mr. Denison made his way again to her side.

Partly because she wished to get rid of her last partner, and possibly influenced by a feeling that it would not do to snub Mr. Kingswood, Elsie got up to dance with him when he asked her, though she more than half regretted having done so when she felt how tightly he held her in his arms, and how he tried to whisper words of endearment in her unwilling ears.

"Let us stroll among the flowers," he whispered, when they paused in their waltz. "I have something to tell you."

But there was nothing that he could say which Elsie wished to hear, and she replied coldly,—

"No, thank you; I want to speak to Miss Birch. Where is she?"

"She is in this conservatory," he replied maddeningly. "Let us go after her."

"No; I see Mrs. Ridgeway over there. I will go to her, if you please," replied the girl decisively.

She had dropped his arm, to be able to open and use her fan, and now she walked towards her chaperone, paying no heed to the remonstrance he uttered, though he walked by her side.

The old lady smiled when the girl returned to her, but they had not exchanged a dozen words before Mr. Denison again came up and asked Elsie to dance, and this time he managed to stay with her until it was time to go to supper, when he led her to the splendid banqueting hall, where the tables were spread for the occasion.

Lord Carhays would have liked to be her cavalier, but that was out of the question, as his mother distinctly made him feel; and Arthur Carew and Harry Kingswood both sought her, and found that they were too late.

Lionel Denison talked, as it was natural for him to talk, about places he had seen, and people whom he had met, and he managed to get Elsie to talk a little about herself, a thing she could very well do without mentioning the Hermitage or any influence which her listener had had upon her life.

From what Lionel told her about himself she guessed, rather than learnt, that he was still unmarried, and her heart throbbed with a thrilling sensation that was not at all of pain as she told herself that her great sacrifice, made for his sake, had been all in vain.

No, not in vain!

If she had not left his house, as she did, to avoid him they could never have met on an equality like this, while she was only too conscious that she was far more worthy of his love—if love he had to give her—than when she stood in his shrubbery listening to the cruel words of her enemy.

Harry Kingswood, watching them jealously, read the situation at a glance, and understood how it was that Elsie gave her society so willingly to one who might be regarded as a stranger to her.

At first he thought that Denison must recognise the girl, but a casual remark from his friend convinced him that this was not so; and he rather prided himself upon his own perspicuity.

"I cannot be mistaken," he mused, as he watched the couple from a distance; "she knows him if he doesn't know her, and she recognises his name and address the first time I met her.

But it doesn't do to have any doubt on such a matter, and I'll clear it up this very night, if she'll only give me the chance. Poor old Denison is falling in love with her, but she, if my surmise is correct, regards him as a father. I must put a stop to this fooling, however, or she'll be marrying him out of gratitude; and though I ought to look after Charlie, who would make me by far the best wife of the two, I can't resist the temptation of making a bid for the beauty."

Thus thinking, he bided his time, and at length the opportunity for which he sought, came.

Elifie was sitting in a secluded alcove alone, Lionel having been called from her side for a few minutes.

He would come back again, he told her, and she had promised to wait for his return.

But Kingswood was not the only one who saw Elifie in her retreat.

Charlie Birch had taken a step forward to join her friend, when she saw Harry Kingswood in advance of her, and just as she hesitated whether to follow him or turn back, Arthur Carew came to her side, and said,—

"You find the room too hot; will you take a turn on the terrace?"

"No; there is a seat behind those trees; I should like to rest there for awhile," was the answer.

And the unsuspecting young man led her to the spot indicated, where, without being seen, they could hear all that passed between Elifie and Mr. Kingswood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OFFER, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

"I HOPE you are having a pleasant evening, Miss Heath," remarked Mr. Kingswood, as he took the seat which Denison had just vacated.

Elifie gave a little start, for her imagination was building a most fantastic castle, which came to a sudden collapse as she glanced up and recognised the speaker.

"Yes, thank you," she replied, coldly, as she turned away her eyes and looked dreamily beyond him.

"You have not danced much!" he said in a tone which made her retort, calmly.—

"I have danced as much as I care to dance in such a crowded room."

"So have I," he responded, with a laugh. "I thought my last partner would have had her dress torn off as we waltzed, the crush was so great. Shall we take a stroll on the terrace? They've covered it in with canvas, and made quite a pleasant place of it."

"No, thank you. I prefer staying where I am," was the answer.

"If you are satisfied I ought to be," he said, gallantly, "particularly as your staying here gives me an opportunity of telling you how much I love you."

"I am sorry that you should tell me anything of the kind," she returned, steadily, but without a shadow of warmth or of sentiment in her tone.

"Why are you sorry?" he asked, quickly and imperiously.

"Because—if you will forgive me for saying so—I think you are mistaken."

"Mistaken in what?" he demanded; "of my feelings towards you, or of yours towards me?"

"Possibly in both," replied Elifie, calmly; "but we won't discuss the matter, if you please, for no good can possibly result from it."

"But I must talk to you," he exclaimed vehemently. "I love you, and you know that I love you; it was to exasperate me and to let me feel your power that you have flirted with Denison to-night."

"Really, Mr. Kingswood, you seem to be strangely forgetting yourself," said Elifie, with great dignity. "I am incapable of 'flirting,' as you term it. I have been very much interested in Mr. Denison."

"Of course; I quite understand that, and you have recognised him, though he has not recognised you," replied Kingswood, in a significant tone; "and you have played him off against

Carew and me. Such tactics are more worthy of your friend Miss Birch than of yourself, Miss Heath."

Only a portion of what he said struck Elifie's mind.

She realised now that her former suspicion of Kingswood knowing something about her was well founded, and she repeated, nervously,—

"Recognised! What do you mean?"

"My meaning is clear enough," he replied, calmly, while his eyes seemed to feast upon her sweet face and to gloat over her agitation. "I recognised you the first time we met. I knew who you were and whence you came, and I should wonder that Denison had not been equally sharp, only you are changed a good bit even in this short time."

"If you know as much as you profess, you will understand the utter uselessness of talking to me of love," said Elifie, with bitter disdain.

"But why?" he asked, eagerly.

"Why?"

And the cruel scorn seemed to wound her acutely as she breathed it.

"Why?" she repeated, in the same tone.

Then she added, with more passion, if with less bitterness,—

"You mock me when you talk of love. If you know the mystery that obscures my birth, you must know that love and marriage are to me impossible. But we will talk no more of this; let us change the subject."

"We cannot change it till you have heard and answered me," persisted Kingswood, thinking she was too tender in her rejection not to have some warm feeling for him in her heart.

Her next words dispelled this allusion, however, for she said, emphatically,—

"I do not love you; and if I did my answer would be still the same. And now leave me, if you please!"

"You say this for the sake of another woman, who fancies that she cares for me, and that I ought to devote myself to her," he exclaimed, indignantly; "you know that is so—you can't deny it!"

"Indeed, I do deny it!" was the equally positive reply. "I don't know in the least to whom you allude."

"Oh! I come now, that's too good. You know well enough, but I suppose you think you ought to be staunch to Charlie, and that is right enough as far as it goes, but you ought to have some consideration for me, Elifie. I love you; I am ready to devote my life to you—I am content to take you as you are, with a name or without a name. Come to me, my darling! You know in your heart that you love me."

"I do not," asserted Elifie angrily, "I do not love you; so far from it, I—I—"

She gasped as though for breath, and her words ended in something like a sob.

"You—you love another!" he cried, incredulously. Then a second afterwards he exclaimed, passionately,—

"I don't believe it. There is nothing about Carew to make a girl lose her head or her heart over him; you say this to torment me. You do love me!"

"I do not," replied Elifie, slowly and emphatically. "Nothing would ever make me love you, and now if you will not leave me I must leave you."

And she rose from her seat.

But he followed her example and rose also, though he said, bitterly,—

"I'll go, of course. Ah! here comes Denison."

Then he sauntered away, to all outward appearance as calm and unruffled as usual.

As for Elifie, her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were so bright with anger that Mr. Denison could not notice her excitement, and he asked with concern,—

"Has anything put you out? Have you and Kingswood been quarrelling?"

"No, we have not quarrelled," she replied, evasively, "but he has vexed me; it is a matter of no consequence, however. He is a friend of yours, is he not?"

"Yes, I have known him some little time, and he made rather a long stay with me this summer. He is a very good sort of fellow when you come to know him."

Elifie made no reply to this.

She was not desirous to discuss Mr. Kingswood. She much preferred that Mr. Denison would talk about himself, but she was afraid to ask many leading questions, lest she should betray some of the great interest she felt in him.

He, however, was not so reticent and began to question her about the people she knew.

As she knew but very few of the numerous company, and as she would not talk any more about herself, he felt puzzled, and perhaps a little mortified, though he did not hesitate to ask if he might call at Monkhill, where he heard she was staying.

"Yes! I dare say Miss Birch will be pleased to see you," she replied, with some embarrassment. "I will introduce you to her before we leave."

At this moment Lord Carhays caught sight of them, and coming forward with the assurance of one whom everybody desires to please, he said, eagerly,—

"Miss Heath, I have been looking everywhere for you. I must have another dance. You know you promised it to me. It's my turn now, Denison."

So saying, his lordship offered his arm, and Elifie had no option but to take it.

Lionel Denison watched the couple as they left him, and he felt with a pang, that the girl who had awakened such a warm feeling in his heart was very much younger than himself, and that it would be but natural that she should prefer young Lord Carhays, who was so much nearer her own age. Yet, in his heart, he felt that she did not do so.

There was something in her glance which seemed to look into his heart, and also to permit him to have a glimpse of her own feelings, while it was likewise very certain that if she had not responded in a measure to his sentiments she would not have allowed him to monopolise her as openly as she had done.

"It's a case of love at first sight," he mused, as he leaned against a statue, watching the young couple dance, "and yet, though I never saw her before, there is something in the face that haunts me. It is very strange. I wonder if I know any of her family."

He was thus meditating when an old lady, whom he had seen with Miss Birch and Elifie, touched his arm, and he turned to listen to her.

"Will you kindly tell Miss Heath, when she stops dancing, that Miss Birch and I are going home," she said, nervously. "Miss Birch is very unwell. I saw Miss Heath talking to you a long while," she added, by way of apology for thus addressing him.

"Yes, certainly, I will bring her to you," he replied promptly.

And he tried to make a sign to the dancers, but Elifie did not, and Carhays would not, see him.

A few minutes after this the music ceased, and Denison went to deliver the message to Elifie.

"Going home!" she repeated in dismay. "What can be the matter with her. Oh! of course, I am ready. Good night, Lord Carhays."

"What a nuisance it is that you have to go so early!" said the heir of the house; "I wish you were staying here, it would be awfully jolly; but I shall ride over to Monkhill in a day or two. You will be there a little longer, won't you?"

"Yes, I am sure to be there; good night. I have had such a pleasant evening. I have quite enjoyed it," she replied brightly.

But Lord Carhays would not leave her. He would go with her to join her friends and to see her safely in the carriage with them; and as Lionel Denison was equally attentive, and was on the watch to say a few more words to her, Elifie might certainly be considered to leave the ball-room in triumph.

That triumph was short-lived, however. As she stepped into the hall a cold blast of air gave

her a sudden chill, and she shivered as though she had received a blow, while the large fur-lined cloak which Mr. Denison instantly wrapped round her failed for the moment to give her warmth.

Charlie Birch, with Mrs. Ridgeway and Mr. Carew, were standing in a group waiting for the carriage, and Elsie was conscious of some change in her friend, even as her eye rested upon her.

"What is the matter?" she asked anxiously, "are you ill?"

"No, I am tired," was the coldly-uttered reply; "very tired."

Then she turned away, and spoke a few words to Lord Carhays, while Denison and Carew both addressed themselves to Elsie.

Fortunately the carriage was announced at that moment, and the three gentlemen went out to the door to help the party into it.

As they knew nothing of Elsie's dependent position, the whole three of them were intensely disgusted to see that Miss Birch stepped into the carriage first, and took the most comfortable seat. Mrs. Ridgeway followed her and sat by her side, while Elsie, who stepped into the carriage last of all, had to sit with her back to the horses.

Naturally enough our little heroine thought nothing of this, for she was the youngest of the party, and she would not have liked to take the places now occupied by either of the two ladies.

But the gentlemen, thanks to Charlie's instance on the point, believed Elsie to be a guest, while Mrs. Ridgeway, it was well known was a paid companion; and therefore to them it would have seemed more natural that Miss Heath should have been treated as the person of most consideration in the party.

As the carriage drove away the gentlemen entered back to the suite of reception rooms.

They were all of them too jealous of each other to compare notes, or to express aloud an opinion upon what they had just witnessed.

Denison, being older than the others, and having the remembrance of certain words and glances wherewith to comfort himself, went back to the company for a little while, and then quietly slipped away to his own room.

And Lord Carhays, having so many things to occupy his attention, forgot Elsie very quickly, and was soon flirting violently with a lady to whom, this time, his mother found no objection.

As for Arthur Carew, he wandered about for a little while in the hope of meeting Harry Kingswood, and having a few plain words of explanation with him, but, failing to find the man he sought, he decided that he had better go home.

And he did so, forgetting altogether that his aunt and sister relied upon his escort, and had likewise no other means of conveyance than the carriage, which, in his abstracted frame of mind, he entered.

Meanwhile, Elsie rode home to Monkhill in silence.

Her thoughts were too busy with Lionel Denison to be very seriously disturbed by any other matter, and she had divined at once that Charlie Birch was put out of temper rather than was ill in health.

Believing that she had had nothing to do with this, and that matters would soon readjust themselves, she indulged in her day-dreams, in which, too, Lionel Denison played an active part; and it was not until they had reached Charlie's house, and were going to their own rooms for the night, that she was rudely awakened from her intoxicating reveries by Miss Birch, who, looking at her with newly-awakened fire in her eyes, said,—

"We shall part to-morrow, Miss Heath."

"Part!" echoed Elsie, in dismay, and not by any means understanding what was meant.

"Yes," was the cold reply; "I was an unwilling listener to your conversation with Mr. Kingswood this evening."

"And if you were!" retorted Elsie, quickly; "you must know that I said nothing that could give you pain. So far from it I—"

"Thank you. That is enough!" interrupted Charlie sharply. "Don't take to yourself the

credit of refusing him on my account. I repeat what I said. We part to-morrow. Good-night."

Then she swept out of the room, leaving the homeless girl alone to face this fresh calamity.

"Not to-morrow, but to-night," thought Elsie, proudly and recklessly. "Another day shall not see the same roof cover us; but I am weary, and I will sleep an hour or two; then I will dress myself and leave this house for ever. Heaven above is witness that I have been true to Charlie."

Then she pulled off her shining raiment, and, wrapping herself up warmly, lay down on the bed to sleep, having firmly resolved to leave this house with the dawn of day.

CHAPTER X.X.

ONCE MORE ADRIFT.

THE gray dawn of a December morning was making its way into her room, when Elsie opened her eyes and looked about her wonderingly.

Her first feeling was one of intense happiness, but this was quickly succeeded by a sensation of acute pain.

As she recalled her meeting with Lionel Denison, and seemed again to see his admiring eyes and to listen to the tones of his tender, though manly voice, the joy in her own heart was almost ecstatic.

But the recollection of the bitter words which Charlie Birch had spoken to her on their return to Monkhill, and the cruel manner in which she had told her that they would part this day, implying that if she did not go willingly she would turn her out of the house, not only deeply wounded our poor heroine, but roused in her a very unusual spirit of indignation.

"I have not deserved such treatment," she thought, as she dressed herself. "Charlie has been very kind to me—very kind, indeed—but I have, at the same time, done all in my power to please her, and I should have thought she possessed more self respect than to turn me out of her house because a man with whom she fancies herself to be in love proposed to marry me. It is not even as though I had accepted him, but, even in that case, her conduct would have been without justification."

She had bathed her face, brushed her hair, and put on a walking-dress by this time, and she was a little startled by the entrance of a servant with her early cup of tea.

"La, miss! how early you're getting up!" exclaimed the girl. "Miss Birch and Mrs. Ridgeway won't get up before noon. If they do then, but I thought you'd like your cup of tea as usual."

"Thank you, I am very glad of it," was the answer.

And the servant, having deposited her tray upon a table, went away.

The woman's careless remark had convinced Elsie that she need be in no great hurry if the mistress of the house would not get up till noon, so she sat down to drink her tea, and to determine whether she would go.

Not an easy matter to decide, remembering she had no home, and had no real friend to whom she could fly.

Her meeting with Lionel Denison had, as it were, shut his door against her more firmly than she had pulled it herself, for now she felt that it would be impossible for her to go to him and ask him to give her shelter.

She forgot all about Edith Grey at this moment she only thought how impossible it would be for her to live under the same roof with Lionel without betraying her true feelings towards him, and she would have suffered any physical or mental torture rather than have done this.

"I cannot go to the Hermitage, even though he is away from it," she reflected; "for he might return at any hour, and then I don't know what would happen."

"No," she continued, after a pause, "there is nothing for me but Palace-gardens. Isolt Greatrex is at home, I know, for I had a very kind letter from her the other day, and she will let me stay with her or will help me to get respectable lodgings where I can live until I find another situation."

She sighed heavily as she came to this conclusion, but she determined not to be downcast; the consciousness of having been true in word, thought, or deed to the friend who had turned so cruelly upon her, upheld her in this trial, and gave her an amount of fortitude which otherwise she would not have possessed.

Having come to this decision, Elsie packed up all her belongings in the boxes which she knew she must leave behind, but she locked and addressed them to herself, care of Miss Greatrex, Palace-gardens, Kensington, London."

Then, having put into a small travelling-bag a few necessaries which she might need till her luggage reached her, she opened her purse and locked at its contents.

Since she came away from Maltby Grange she had had but few opportunities for spending money, and the consequence was that she had still very nearly the same coins which Mrs. Maltby had paid her.

Charlie Birch had been most liberal in the way of presents of dresses and jewellery, but Elsie had not been with her quite three months as yet, and consequently she had not received any salary.

She felt very glad of this now, and she determined that if she could possibly get along without it, she would never touch a penny of Charlie's money.

"It is her money that spoils her," was a conclusion that many people besides herself came to with regard to the heiress of Monkhill; "but for that she would be almost perfect."

At first Elsie thought she would go away without leaving a word behind, but as she thought of Charlie, and of the many noble traits in her character, her own heart softened towards her, and she wrote the following brief note:—

"DEAR MISS BIRCH.—You told me last night that we must part to-day, and, therefore, to save both you and myself further pain, I have thought it best to go as early as possible. I cannot take my luggage with me, but I will ask you to kindly have it sent to the address written upon it. Thanking you for all your past kindness and hoping that when I am gone you will judge me more fairly than you did when we parted.—Believe me, yours affectionately,

"ELFIE."

She was not quite satisfied with this. She was very much tempted to re-write it, leaving out the last sentence, feeling that it was rather beneath her own dignity to indulge in the mildest rebukes, but the sound of a bell which she knew came from Charlie's room, startled her, and convinced her she had no time to lose:

So she put on her hat and cloak quickly, glanced once round the room where she had been comparatively happy, and having earnestly prayed for guidance and protection from Him "who changeth never," she took her bag in her hand and walked softly downstairs.

There were no servants about, and she put her letter upon the hall-table, and then walked out at the front door, closing it behind her.

Once, as she was going down the carriage-drive, she thought she heard a voice calling her, but she did not look back.

If it were Charlie, and if she really wanted her she had servants enough to send to entreat her to return.

But no one came. Probably the voice existed only in her own fancy, and her sense of being unfairly treated was so great that she would have found it almost impossible to go back, if Charlie herself had asked her to do so.

It was not until she had proceeded some little way on the main road to Tiverton that she began to realise what a very long walk she had before her.

Six miles it was roughly called, though it was much nearer seven, and she would have to go through the town before she reached the railway station that was at the farther side of it.

She had walked about a couple of miles, when a farmer and his wife came by in a light gig, and observing that she was not getting along very

quickly, and that her bag seemed to weary her, the good-natured woman offered her a lift.

This was gratefully accepted, and the next five miles were got over in much more comfortable manner than the first two.

Arrived at Tiverton, Elfie thanked the kind people who had helped her, and made her way direct to the railway station.

Here, to her chagrin, she found that the train which would meet the London train at Tiverton Roads had started, and there would not be another till late in the day.

This was all the more serious, because the later train would arrive in London at such a time that it would be impossible for her to go direct to the Greatrex, particularly as she was not expected.

What to do she did not know.

Ten minutes earlier, and she would have been on her way to town; but now she was bewildered, and knew not whither to go.

Standing thus, irresolute and despondent, she is startled to hear a voice at her side say,—

"So, Miss Heath, we meet again!"

She looks up quickly, and scarcely knows whether to be vexed or pleased at finding herself face to face with Mrs. Penfold of Trebartha.

The face of anyone whom she has previously known is, however, a relief to her in her present desolate condition, and she answers the greeting politely, and inquires after the old lady's health.

"I am well enough," is the abrupt reply. "Where are you going? What do you do here?"

Elfie explained that she had just missed the train for London, and she was hesitating what to do.

"Come with me," said Mrs. Penfold, promptly. "I'm going to Exeter. You'll get two lines of railway there. But what's become of your luggage—not got any?"

"It will be sent on after me," replied Elfie, coldly, feeling reluctant to go with this strange woman, who had appeared before her so unexpectedly.

"All the better; it does not tie you. Get the tickets, Perran. Give me your arm, Miss Heath; I'm not so young or so active as I once was."

So saying she took the girl's arm, and Elfie felt that her consent had been taken for granted, and she could not now go back.

Doubtful whether she was acting wisely, and yet naturally thankful in her unprotected position to have some respectable member of her own sex with whom she could stay until she could get a train for London, Elfie followed Mrs. Penfold into the railway carriage, and they were soon on their way to Exeter.

The journey was a comparatively short one, and they drove to an hotel, where the mistress of Trebartha was evidently well known.

Luncheon was ordered, and quickly brought, and it was not until she began to eat that Elfie found how hungry she was, and remembered that she had not had her usual breakfast.

She did not observe how Mrs. Penfold watched her, and studied her expressive face, and she was not a little startled, therefore, when the old lady said, in her usual abrupt way,—

"So you and Miss Birch have quarrelled, and you have left her house in a tantrum!"

"Indeed, you are mistaken," replied Elfie, and she tried to keep up an air of reserve that was quite thrown away upon Mrs. Penfold, who paid not the slightest heed to it, and who now asked,—

"How am I mistaken? Haven't you quarrelled?"

"Well, yes," assented Elfie, with much reluctance; "Miss Birch has quarrelled with me, but I have not quarrelled with her, and I don't indulge in 'tantrums,' as you call them."

"Oh, don't you? I'm glad to hear it. But you left Miss Birch this morning without saying good-bye to her, I suppose?"

"She was asleep," replied the girl, shortly.

"And she doesn't know where you have gone!" persisted Mrs. Penfold.

"She knows where I mean to go, for I wrote the address upon my luggage."

"Ah! indeed. Humph; were you going to the house of a relative?"

"No; I have no relatives. I was going to a friend with whom I hope to stay until I can find a situation," was the reluctantly uttered reply.

"Oh! you are looking out for a situation, are you?" remarked Mrs. Penfold, carelessly. "What salary did Miss Birch give you?"

"Fifty pounds a-year," was the answer.

"Fifty; well, I'll give you a hundred if you like to come to Trebartha with me. You won't have much to do besides read and sing to me sometimes, and amuse me."

"You are very kind," responded Elfie, doubtfully; "but isn't Trebartha a fearfully lonely place? Shouldn't I be almost out of the world if I went there?"

"It depends upon what you call the world," replied the singular old lady, with an inflection of scorn in her voice. "Trebartha is my world, and to me there is no place like it."

Still Elfie hesitated.

In truth she dreaded being shut up in a gloomy Cornish castle with this strange woman, with only servants in the house, and a few fishermen and their families living around.

But at the same time the prospect of living close to the sea was alluring, and she had heard Mrs. Maliby say that no scenery in England could surpass the wild and solitary grandeur of the country about Trebartha Castle.

If she had any other place to go, or even if Isola Greatrex had expected her, and she had been sure of a welcome in her house for even a few days, she would have declined this tempting offer; but, situated as she now was, she scarcely knew how to do so, and while she was still doubtful, her companion asked, abruptly,—

"Well, have you made up your mind—are you coming with me?"

"Yes; perhaps it is the best thing I can do," was the answer, "though," she added, with a smile, "I very much doubt my ability to amuse you."

"If I am content to risk that you needn't bother yourself about it," was the brusque reply. "And now about luggage; Perran had better go and buy some clothes for you, hadn't she?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I have plenty of clothes at Monkhill, and Miss Birch will send them to me directly she knows my new address. I might send to her at once, and let her know of the change in my plans."

"Very well; write now, if you like, and Perran can post the letter as she goes out; but you won't get your luggage for a week if it is sent off to-morrow. You don't know the cross-country we shall have to travel, and the carrier doesn't come to Trebartha but once a week. Never mind; don't bother yourself about clothes. Perran will look after that, I'll see how the trains go. We shan't get further than Launceston to-night, and we must do the rest of the journey by coach to-morrow."

To this Elfie made no reply, except to sit down and write a note to Miss Birch, asking her to redirect her luggage, so that it might be sent to herself, care of Mrs. Penfold, Trebartha Castle, near Padstow, Cornwall.

As that letter, though written, was never posted, and consequently did not reach its intended destination, we need not trouble ourselves any more about it.

Soon after Perran had departed on her errand of posting the letter and fulfilling certain commissions from her mistress, one of which was to purchase a stock of ready-made linen for the new companion, Mrs. Penfold remembered that she herself wanted to make a few purchases, and accordingly a day was called, and she and Elfie got into it.

They drove to the principal draper's shop in the town, and here Mrs. Penfold bought a walking costume and dinner dress for herself, and the same, in a different style and material, for Elfie.

"I am sure I don't know why you have been spending so much money upon me," she said to Mrs. Penfold, when they got back to the hotel; "I feel as though I don't quite deserve it."

"It is a whim of mine," replied the old

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lady, with unusual tenderness in her voice, "and I don't indulge in many whims of the kind."

Then, as Elsie, despite her delight in her new fare, could not repress a yawn, she changed her tone and said, sharply,—

"You are sleepy?"
"Yes," replied the girl, frankly, though she smothered another yawn. "I was at a ball last night, where I danced a great deal, and have not had my usual amount of sleep."

"Where was the ball?" asked Mrs. Penfold, quickly.

"At Trevelyan Court," was the answer; "Miss Birch and I were both there."

"Ah! and then Miss Birch found fault with you when you got back. I suppose you danced a great deal with somebody for whom she had a liking!"

"Oh, no! I didn't dance much with him, for I don't like him; it was—"

Then she stopped suddenly, and added,—

"But I can't tell you about it. Still the fact remains that I am tired."

"I suppose it was not Clarence Maitby about whom you quarrelled!" asked Mrs. Penfold, while she fixed her eyes with searching intentness upon the girl's face.

"Oh, no! Mr. Maitby was not at the ball," was the prompt reply.

"Wasn't he? And you haven't seen him since you left the Grange, I suppose?"

"No, I have not seen him, and I never wish to see him again," was the reply, uttered with a little laugh, that in no wise weakened the emphatic assertion.

But Mrs. Penfold had turned away, and pretended to be looking over the railway guides.

When she spoke again it was to say,—

"We have just time to drink a cup of tea, and to start. You can sleep in the train; it will be quite late before we reach Launceston."

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

SUSY: "He says he loves me, yet he has only known me two days." Her Friend: "Well, perhaps that's the reason, dear."

"MAN wants but little here below," remarked the landlady. "And here is the place to get it," continued the facetious boarder.

NEWELL LITTLE: "Dadham isn't very brilliant." Newsome Moore: "Brilliant! Why, he's considered a fool even in the smart set!"

FIRST CHICAGO GIRL: "Are you making much progress in tracing back your family tree?" Second Chicago Girl: "Oh, dear, yes! Why, I've already got back as far as mother's first husband!"

ARTIST: "Now, give me your candid opinion of the picture!" Critic: "It is utterly worthless." Artist: "Yes, I know your opinion is worthless, but I am curious to hear it, nevertheless."

MRS. SUBURB: "No more milk? What's the matter?" Gardener: "The cow has stopped giving milk, mum." "Goodness me! Why?" "Because she's dry, mum." "Then why in the world don't you give her a drink?"

HEAD WAITER: "Shall I send a walter to wait on you, sir?" Guest (who has been waiting in vain for thirty minutes): "I am compelled to request this extreme privilege, even though I know it disturbs your system."

"No, Ellen, I can't take down any carpets. The doctor said all my recreation must consist of open-air sports." "All right, William; there are three carpets out on the line which you can beat."

TEACHER: "Try to remember this: Milton, the poet, was blind. Do you think you can remember it?" Bobbie Smart: "Yes, ma'am." Teacher: "Now, what was Milton's great misfortune?" Bobbie Smart: "He was a poet."

FIRST YOUNG LADY (examining directory in drug store): "I cannot find the name in this directory, Ebel." Second Young Lady: "No! What shall we do?" "Let us go to another drug store and examine their directory."

GREENE: "Miss Longhope always expected to be married some day." De Witt: "Well, her dream has partly come true; she has eloped." Greene: "Why, I heard she became insane." De Witt: "Yes; her imagination ran away with her."

"Now tell me," said the visitor to the penitentiary, "if you had had your life to live over, don't you think you would choose a different road?" "You bet I would," answered the prisoner. "I'd take the road through the woods, and they'd never catch me."

"MR. WHITE," said a lawyer to a witness in the box, "at the time these papers were executed you were speculating, were you not?" "Yes, sir." "You were in oil!" "I was," "And what are you in now?" "Bankruptcy," was the solemn reply.

"JOHNNY," he whispered to her little brother, "did your sister get a note from me last night? It was written on pink paper." "I think she must have got it," said Johnny, "cause when she came down to breakfast this morning her hair was done up in pink curl papers."

CITTERLY: "Well, you are living in the country now, how do you like it?" "I haven't had time to find out; I've only been there a little over a week, and I had to stay in bed last Sunday to make up for the sleep I lost by getting up so early and reaching home so late."

BURGLAR (trying to rob a safe, unexpectedly interrupted by the entrance of the merchant): "Hello! Who's there?" Merchant: "Pray don't let me disturb you in your work. I lost the key to-day, and shall be thankful if you can manage to open the lock."

"WILLIE," said a mother to her four-year-old hopeful, "you must not interrupt me when I am talking to the ladies. Wait until we are finished; then you can talk." "But, mamma, replied the little fellow, "by the time you are finished I shall have forgotten what I wanted to say."

MRS. MACSWAT (at the musicale): "Don't you think it was too bad that the accompanist drowned Miss Squaller's voice so during her solo, professor?" Professor Meyerhoffer (emphatically): "Himself, no! I think me dot drowning vos too easy a death for such a voice as dot!"

"DO you think you can clear him?" asked the devoted wife of the lawyer. "I hope so, madam," replied the lawyer, "but I'm afraid—" "Why, he has lived here all his life," she interrupted, "and knows every one." "Yes, and every one knows him," rejoined the lawyer. "That's what worries me."

"YOU know that red-headed, freckle-faced, big-nosed Mr. Bruce, don't you?" asked the girl in blue of her friend in pink as they lolled on Margate Extension. "Yes. What of him?" "Mabel Wilson is engaged to him." "Did she tell you?" "No; but yesterday morning she asked me if I didn't think he was handsome."

MRS. HARDUPPE: "John, the butcher we had when we lived at the other end of the town has found out our address. He called with that last year's bill, and was very impudent." Mr. Harduppe (hotly): "Impudent, was he? Well, now, we'll just let him wait for his money."

"YOU used to say that you couldn't love him if he were the last man in the world." "Yes, I know." "And yet you are engaged to be married to him. You have changed." "Not at all. You see, if he were the last man in the world there couldn't be this rich old uncle of his, who has promised to leave him everything."

TENANT (who has complained of water in the cellar and leakages from the roof): "I certainly adhere to my original decision that until these defects are remedied I cannot pay any more rent." Landlord: "Then I must give the order to have you put out on the pavement in the morning." Tenant: "Thanks. I have no doubt it will be drier and more sheltered there."

WIFE: "There, dear. Here are the magazines, here's the whisky and soda, and a box of your favourite cigars, and the papers. If you want anything, just ring the bell." Husband: "What on earth is the master?" Wife: "Nothing. I merely wanted to make your home as clublike as possible."

IRISH LAWYER (addressing the Court): "Your Honour, I shall first absolutely prove to the jury that the prisoner could not have committed the crime with which he is charged. If that does not convince the jury, I shall show that he was insane when he committed it. If that fails, I shall prove an alibi."

TOMMY was presented lately by his older sister with a neat pen-wiper for use at school where he has just begun attendance. He admired it, but remarked, "I don't have much use for it, Jenille." "Why not, Tommy? You use a pen every day at school." "Yes, I know it." "Why don't you need a pen-wiper, then?" she replied. "Cause I always wipe my pen on the girl's hair that sits in front of me!"

MAGISTRATE: "You are charged, sir, with dragging this young woman, forcing her into a car, and driving off with her like mad." Prisoner: "Y-e-s, sir. I live in the suburbs. This morning my wife told me not to dare to come home without a girl, and I didn't know of any other way to get one." Magistrate: "I'll take this young girl home with me and place her under my wife's protection. I live in the suburbs myself. You'll have to catch another."

A VERY short-sighted old gentleman going into one of our large towns for the first time, and coming from the heart of the country, seeing a man digging, went up to him, and said: "My man, for whom diggest thou this long and narrow grave?" But the man took no notice. Going closer, he remarked again: "My man, for whom diggest thou this long and narrow grave?" "Go on, you silly old fossil! I'm laying gas-pipes!"

AT a certain builder's yard, it was the custom to pay the men their money in little bags each week. One Saturday, the master told Pat, an Irish labourer, when paying him, that he should not require his services any more. On the following Monday, as the master was going round the yard, he saw Pat at work as usual. "Hello, Pat!" said he; "didn't I give you the sack on Saturday?" "No, sir," said Pat; "sure it was the same little bag I've always had." Pat's services were retained.

A FATHER had been lecturing his young hopeful upon the evils of staying out late at night and getting up late in the morning. "You never will amount to anything," he continued, "unless you turn over a new leaf. Remember that the early bird catches the worm." "How about the worm, father?" inquired the young man. "Wasn't he rather foolish to get up so early?" "My son," replied the old man, solemnly, "that worm hadn't been to bed at all. He was on his way home."

MRS. SUBURB: "Is this the house you've been talking about? I don't like it at all." Agent: "It's the latest Queen Anne style, mum." Mrs. Suburb: "I don't like it. The kitchen opens right into the parlour, or nearly so." Agent: "Yes, mum. Queen Anne was a famous cook, mum. She named that fine old apple pudding, 'brown Betty,' after Queen Elizabeth, mum. Queen Elizabeth was noted for doing things up brown, you know, mum." Mrs. Suburb: "And, dear me, the cellar is half full of water." Agent: "Yes, mum. In those old days people always kept water on hand, to use in time of a siege, you know, mum."

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SOCIETY.

THE Grand Duke Serge and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth will leave Russia about the end of January on a tour through Italy, and they are to pay a visit to the Queen at Bordighera, where they will probably be staying at the Cap Martin Hotel near Mentone.

THE Empress Frederick has arrived at Lerici, on the Gulf of Spezia, where she will reside, according to present arrangements, until the end of March at the beautiful Villa Marigola. The Emperor William has ordered a German Admiralty yacht to proceed to Spezia, where she will lie during the residence of the Empress Frederick at Lerici, in order that her Majesty may be able to take short cruises along the coast. The Empress Frederick will spend the months of April and May at her newly purchased villa on the Lake of Garda.

PRINCESS LOUISE seems likely to become one of the richest members of our Royal Family. Her marriage with the Marquis of Lorne has not necessitated the keeping up of any great state, and being childless, her expenses are comparatively few. On her marriage she received a dowry of £30,000, and she had magnificent wedding gifts of diamonds, rubies, pearls, and other jewels. Like the rest of the Queen's children, she has an income of £6,000 a year.

IT is said that the Princess Elisabeth of Austria, only child of the late Crown Prince Rudolph and of the Crown Princess Stephanie, is betrothed to the Duke Ulric of Württemberg, who is a Lieutenant of the 2nd Württemberg Uhlan, and son of Duke Philippe of Württemberg and the Archduchess Maria Theresa of Austria. The Archduchess Elisabeth is only sixteen years of age, and the Duke twenty-two, but it is said that the wedding will be celebrated early next year. Duke Philippe built the magnificent palace in the Ringstrasse in Vienna, which is now known as the Hotel Imperial.

THERE is a possibility that the Emperor Menelik of Abyssinia may come to England during the year 1900. It has already been announced that he will visit France and Russia, but this is said to be premature. The fact of the matter is that Menelik, unlike European Sovereigns, is not able to come and go as he pleases. His personal share in the government of his dominions is very considerable, and at times State matters are so pressing that the Emperor cannot possibly be absent; moreover, he has scarcely any Ministers of sufficient authority to make it possible to delegate his powers to them. If he should come, however, Menelik will decidedly be one of the most interesting visitors, from a popular point of view, that have been seen here for many years. While he must receive all credit for his advocacy of civilisation, he still has a sufficient touch of savagery left to make him a personality of more than usual interest.

THE Queen's suite of private apartments at Balmoral looks to the west, and commands beautiful views of Deeside. The charming sitting-room in which Her Majesty spends most of her time indoors when in the North contains a substantial writing-table, also a smaller table on which are placed the despatch-boxes, and dockets letters and other documents with which, even when at Balmoral, the Queen has to deal every day. Messengers arrive every morning from the South, and, in addition to the private wire which connects Balmoral Castle with London, there is also a telephone to all the most important places on the estates, including Birkhall House, Aberfeldy Castle, and the Commissioner's residence at Crathie. Next to Her Majesty's rooms is the suite known even now as the "Prince Consort's Apartments," and this is preserved in exactly the same order as it was when he left it in the October of 1861. Balmoral Castle is full of mementoes of Prince Albert, many portraits of him at different ages being hung on the walls of the principal rooms and corridors, and the very fine statue of him by Thos. is found in replica in the grounds, where it is of bronze, and in the house, where it is of marble.

STATISTICS.

OVER 30,000 persons are employed in the tobacco industry of New York.

An ordinary railway engine is equivalent in strength to about 900 horses.

THREE thousand marriages are performed every day all over the world.

IN the Imperial Library at Calcutta, more than 100,000 volumes on Indian affairs are brought together and classified.

THE longest "day" of the year at New York is fifteen hours, at London sixteen and a half, at St. Petersburg nineteen, at Torne, Finland, twenty-two, and at Spitzbergen three and a-half months.

GEMS.

ORIGINALITY blazes a new track, while eccentricity runs on one wheel in an old rut.

The great duty of life is not to give pain, and the most acute reasoner cannot find an excuse for one who voluntarily wounds the heart of a fellow-creature.

If some folks spent as much time in knowing men as they do in finding out things about them they would make a better business of life.

IT is when great truths have struck great men that great movements have started forth. Every truth of whatever size has breezes for mental sails whenever they are unfurled.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

AN orange frosting can be quickly made by mixing together the yolk of one egg, a tablespoonful of orange juice, a half-teaspoonful of orange extract, and enough sifted confectioner's sugar to make it thick enough to spread.

POACHED EGGS WITH GRAVY.—Break four eggs into cups. Have some boiling water in a deep frying-pan, add a little salt and vinegar to it, slip in the eggs without breaking the yolks. When the white part is set boil them gently for three minutes. Lift them one by one on a slice, drain, and cut off the edges. Serve on fried or toasted bread with brown gravy or sauce poured round them.

PICKLING ONIONS.—Peel the onions (one pound, perhaps), lay in strong salt and water for a day, drain them, and put on in a pan with water and a little milk to boil five minutes gently, lift out and pat on cloth to dry, cover with another cloth, and when dry and cold put into a bottle, pouring over them a breakfast-cupful of white vinegar in which a teaspoonful of peppercorns and a little ginger has been boiled; when cold, cork; ready for use in a month.

FRIED FILLETS OF BRILL.—Ingredients: Some slices of bilt, five tablespoomfuls of salad-oil, one tablespoomful of vinegar, one tablespoomful of chopped parsley, the thinly pared rind of a lemon pepper and salt, one egg, gluten bread-crumb. Trim and wash the slices of brill. Lay them in a dish, and pour over them the salad-oil and vinegar, also the parsley, lemon-rind, and a good dust of pepper and salt. After they have lain in this "marinade," as it is called, for an hour, lift them out, draining them well. Beat up the eggs on a plate. Dip the fillets into the gluten crumbs to dry them, then brush them well over with the egg, lift them out again, and cover them with crumbs, and "firm" them on with your knife. Have a deep pan of fat on the fire. When it is so hot that a bluish smoke can be seen to rise from it, put in the fillets of brill, and fry them a golden brown. Draw them on kitchen paper, and serve them piled up on a fancy lace paper. Garnish with neatly-cut pieces of lemon.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ALEXANDRIA possesses the largest artificial harbour in the world.

THE pearl oyster begins to produce pearls when it is six or seven years old.

The theft of electricity is not a crime in Germany, there being no express law against it.

THE price of medicine in Prussia is regulated by the State, a new price-list being published every year.

It is said that an ordinary caterpillar increases ten thousand times in bulk thirty days from the time it is hatched.

THE tiger's strength exceeds that of the lion. Five men can easily hold down a lion, but nine are required to hold a tiger.

JANUARY 7th used to be known as St. Diffrid's Day, work being supposed to be begun again on that day after the Christmas holidays.

A DIVER has discovered that fishes in the tropical seas, when frightened, dart in different directions, each fish concealing itself in submerged vegetation nearest its own colour.

THE next total solar eclipse will take place on May 23rd, 1900. In order that the observations may be made in as useful and systematic a manner as possible, astronomers are already considering plans for observing the phenomenon.

A KISS is the Icelandic mode of salutation at meeting and parting between all classes. The pastor is obliged to kiss all his flock after service is over; the peasant kisses the daughters of the magistrate, and they kiss him in return.

IT is probable that few people know what an enormous quantity of old iron in the shape of anchors, chains, &c., is annually rescued from the sea. During ten months as much as 120 tons weight was dredged up on the coast of England alone.

THE British intend experimenting with an automobile gun carriage for army use. A tricycle, driven by electricity, forms the carriage, and upon it is mounted a service pattern Maxim gun. The weight of the gun and carriage is only about 140 lb., permitting quick movement and early readiness when in position.

THE first of January does not so really represent the astronomical beginning of the year as Christmas. The New Year begins when the sun turns from its greatest declination to come back to a higher position in the heavens. In very early times this day was kept as a day of rejoicing, for it told the heathen nations that there would soon be warmth to vivify nature and make life possible. The Romans, Celts and Germans from the oldest times celebrated the season with greatest feasts. Many superstitions and abuses accompanied it, some of which still remain. The Church sought to banish the heathen element and substituted grand Christmas liturgies, songs of praise and dramatic representations of the birth of Christ instead. It has now become a day for the general cultivation of sentiments of kindness and universal good will.

THE French make little of Christmas, but on New Year's Day everybody is expected to send an offering of sweets to his friends. Gowns, jewellery, gloves, silk hose, and artificial flowers are likewise considered proper tributes, and a pretty woman, respectably connected, may reckon her presents at something considerable, and fill her drawing-room with the display, for it is the custom to show all the gifts. At Coventry, in England, it is customary to eat what are called God-cakes, on New Year's Day; they are of triangular shape, about half an inch thick, filled with mincemeat, and are cried through the streets at a halfpenny apiece. In some rural districts, notably those of Gloucester and the orchard countries, the old custom of carrying the Wassail bowl is still followed. The bowl is filled with ale, nutmeg, spices, sugar, toast, and roasted apples, and corresponds to the "gossip" bowl alluded to by Shakespeare. Young women carry it around from door to door, and no one must refuse to sip and pledge the bearers.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

H. M. S.—The Queen gave it originally.

INCOMPETENT.—Buy a form of will at a stationer's.

P. L.—Perhaps a lawyer's letter would quiet them.

OLD READER.—Get a solicitor to protest your interest.

BERT.—You may plead the Statute of Limitations after six years.

UNCERTAINTY.—If she is alive marriage would be void and bigamous.

ANXIOUS.—Misdescriptions do not of themselves validate marriages.

W. A.—We are sorry, but it is against our rule to grant your request.

RED, WHITE AND BLACK.—The British soldiers at Waterloo numbered 23,991.

DON.—You must most certainly pay for the whole time you are in the rooms.

ESTHER.—As far as we can understand your case, we should say you would have to pay.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—October 20th, 1897. The Gordon Highlanders stormed the heights.

ERNEST.—There is no disparity between your lover's age of twenty-eight and your own of twenty-one.

E. R.—The capital of the Transvaal is Pretoria. The capital of the Orange Free State is Bloemfontein.

CLARENCE.—We should say you could not, but it depends almost entirely upon terms of agreement.

E. L.—Lamp Light is the best artificial light we have. Soft and steady, it is grateful to the eye.

J. M.—The last execution at Tyburn took place in November, 1783. Tyburn-road is the modern Oxford-street.

MINNIE.—Must be witnessed by two witnesses both present with testator whom witnessing him and each other.

POOR MOTHER.—It is quite impossible to foretell the conditions on which the ultimate settlement may be made.

AWKWARD.—Mix freely in good conversational society, and keep the judgment in constant guard over the emotions.

BRITISHMAN.—The Prince of Wales, should he come to the throne, will reign as Edward the Seventh, not as Albert the First.

BELLA.—If you do not feel equal to telling him personally, you should write him a letter explaining your change of feeling.

DICK'S SISTER.—An action for breach of promise of marriage cannot be maintained against a minor, providing he pleads his minority.

SWEET SAVANTINE.—It is a lady's place to speak first, her being equivalent to saying that she is willing to obtain the acquaintance.

POLLY.—We advise you to send the garment to a cleaner. You would probably not be successful in removing the stains yourself.

S. E.—You had better get a book of instructions on the subject; there are several such dealing with lady's art fancy works of various sorts.

PATLINE.—It would depend a good deal upon what the stain was made of; you might try rinsing in two or three changes of clean water.

MINGER.—They often unaccountably go off song in this manner. Place them with other singing birds, and add lettuce seeds to their other food.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Have nothing further to do with the fellow, unless of his own accord he gives you a satisfactory explanation of his silence.

HEATHER.—The proper person to consult is your mother, and if she cannot get a satisfactory explanation from the young man discard him at once.

GOWARD.—If you dread the pain of the operation, have it performed under the influence of chloroform administered by a competent medical man.

J. H.—The Hudson Bay Company was abolished in 1863, when the Canadian Government took over their territories at the expiration of their lease.

ANARCHIST.—London is selected for some special reason; the briste can have the proclamation made there by taking lodgings in the City for twenty-one days.

FANCIER.—Paraffin, bath-brisk, and whiting mixed to a paste is excellent for cleaning fire-irons. Remove all stains by rubbing with this, and polish with dry whiting and soft dusters.

NETTY.—Rub it while still hot with a piece of rag dipped in turpentine. This removes all grease; and if a drop or two of turpentine is also mixed with the blacking the stove will polish with very little trouble.

INCOMPETENT.—As soon as you begin to notice the least sign of white, rub the parts gently, when the glove on the hand, with a flannel dipped in olive oil and soap. This not only restores the colour but the gloss.

R. I. W.—Candidates for the Civil Service, as a rule, must be between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Apply for all particulars at the offices of the Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, stating what branch of the Service you desire to enter.

A. R.—A "pow-wow" among the Indians is the name given to an incantation preliminary to a grand hunt, a council, a warlike expedition, &c., and is usually accompanied with dancing, great noise and confusion.

WONZAR.—Where stories of the serious nature you mention are freely circulated about a person, there is generally at least a shadow of truth to back them. In any case it would be worth while to investigate.

MAG.—Many people lay a piece of buttered paper over the cut portion. It is usually sufficient to cover it closely with clean earthenware, and keep it in a cool, dry place.

JAC. ANDY.—You must first serve four years at sea, then pass an examination for second mate, sail another year, pass for first mate or only mate, sail another year and pass for master.

ANGELA.—Of course the acid dulls quickly. We can give you nothing better for polishing than rottenstone and oil; it keeps bright longer than any acid; some use spirits of turpentine with the rottenstone.

THIRLOMATION.—The United States Government would at once put a stop to their folly by capturing and imprisoning them; this was done in case of those in the States who organised to go to Cuba, and fight against the Spaniards.

YULE LOG.—Coal was first used at Newcastle-on-Tyne about 1230. About fifty years later it became an article of trade between that place and London. It was generally considered so injurious to the health that it was regarded as a public nuisance.

THURLOMATION.—The United States Government would at once put a stop to their folly by capturing and imprisoning them; this was done in case of those in the States who organised to go to Cuba, and fight against the Spaniards.

OLD TIMES, OLD FRIENDS, OLD LOVE.

THERE are no days like the good old days—

'The days when we were youthful,
When humankind were pure of mind.'

And speech and deeds were truthful;
Before a love for sordid gold.'

Became man's ruling passion,
And before each dame and maid became

Slaves to the tyrant Fashion.

There are no girls like the good old girls—

'Against the world I'd stake 'em;
So buxom, smart, and clean of heart.'

That the lads could not forsake them.
They were rich in spirit and common-sense,

A plenty all supporting;

They could bake and brew, and teach school, too,

And they made the likeliest courting.

There are no boys like the good old boys—

'When we were boys together!
When the grass was sweet to the brown, bare feet.'

That the lads could not forsake them.

They were rich in spirit and common-sense,

O'er all supporting;

They could bake and brew, and teach school, too,

And they made the likeliest courting.

There are no boys like the good old boys—

'When we were boys together!
When the grass was sweet to the brown, bare feet.'

That the lads could not forsake them.

They were rich in spirit and common-sense,

O'er all supporting;

They could bake and brew, and teach school, too,

And they made the likeliest courting.

There is no love like the good old love—

'The love that mother gave us.'

We are old, old men, yet we pine again

'For that precious grace—an, save us!'

So we dream and dream of the good old time,

And our hearts grow tender, fonder,

As those dear old dreams bring soothng gleams

Of heaven away off yonder.

HOUSEWIFE.—A little pipeclay may be used for kitchen cloths and other much soiled articles. It has a very cleansing effect, and if a little be dissolved in the water, only about half the usual amount of soap will be required.

CUNNING.—There are no exact statistics, but the latest available figures of the populations are Cape Colony, 1,599,930; Natal, 630,817; Orange Free State, 207,500; and the Transvaal over 750,000, including natives.

ISOMER.—All peers below the rank of Duke are commonly known as "Lords," but "Lord" is not a rank in the peerage, except as a courtesy title. The title Lord generally stands for Baron (not baronet), and a Baron is below an Earl.

NEW READER.—The original meaning of matriculate is to enrol, from Latin *matricula*, a roll. As universities prescribe a certain form of examination before allowing a student to enrol himself, passing this examination is generally understood by matriculation.

SAINKEY GAMP.—Hold the handle with the right hand, and with the left begin from the top of the ferrule and work up to the handle, turning with the right hand at the handle. If the folds of the umbrella crease it is not rolled properly. Keeping an umbrella tightly rolled will cut the material.

SOLDIER'S BACHTHAA.—Three hundred and fifty-four British soldiers and sailors on Majuba Hill exposed to the raking fire of 2,000 Boers, who were effectively hidden throughout; of 150 Highlanders in the fight, only 24 came out unscathed; the British loss was 93 killed and 128 wounded, or fully two-thirds of the force; Boer loss never known.

INCOMPETENT.—London is selected for some special reason; the briste can have the proclamation made there by taking lodgings in the City for twenty-one days.

NETTY.—Rub it while still hot with a piece of rag dipped in turpentine. This removes all grease; and if a drop or two of turpentine is also mixed with the blacking the stove will polish with very little trouble.

L. B.'G.—There are a variety of sweet-smelling gums, &c., used for the purpose. A good mixture is: Allow to every half-pound of rose leaves an ounce and a half each of gum benjamin, gum storax and orris root, half an ounce of cloves, three ounces sandal wood chips, a vanilla pod or two, a blade or two of mace and a little musk. A little spirit may be sprinkled over the whole when they are mixed well together. Then shut them up in a jar to be opened as required.

PAULINE.—Fine rottenstone and putty powder are used. The latter is employed by marble polishers, who make it into a thin paste with water, and rub it on with a thick piece of felt. Coloured marbles may generally be kept in good condition by being rubbed over occasionally with a little oil—very little—and then being well polished with a soft cloth. The chief, though unmentioned, ingredient in all polishes, be it remembered, is elbow grease.

P. S.—It is quite true that fish are attracted by light. So well is this fact recognised that the electric light is nowadays employed in deep-sea fishing, as it has been found that if a light is sunk in the water it attracts fish from all around. The difficulty has been to guard against the nets becoming entangled with the lines that conduct the current to the lamp, but a light has been invented that can be tossed overboard free from all attachments.

EDITH.—The white spots on the finger nails appear because the nails are sometimes separated by knobs and other causes from the membrane beneath them, to which they are otherwise attached, and consequently become dry and opaque. The semi-circular whitish patches at the base of the finger nails arise because there the nail is newly formed from the vascular substance out of which it grows, and has not yet assumed its proper horny and transparent nature.

A. C. G.—The caper is the pickled flower bud of a trailing shrub, which grows freely, like the ivy, in countries bordering on the Mediterranean. The buds are gathered every morning, and are at once put in vinegar and salt. The seed of the nasturtium treated in the same way is just as good as the caper. The seed should be gathered as soon as the petals fall and left in salt for a few days. Then place them in hot vinegar with a few peppercorns, and when cold, bottle.

ADELA.—Provide a plate with some of the best whiting to be had, and have ready some clean warm water and a piece of flannel, which dip in the water and squeeze nearly dry; then take as much whiting as will adhere to it, apply it to the painted surface, when a little rubbing will instantly remove any dirt or grease, after which wash the part well with clean water, rub it dry with a soft chamois leather. Paint thus cleaned looks as good as when first laid on, without any injury to the most delicate colours.

OLD READER.—Great Britain, France, and Italy are the three leading first-class naval Powers, their relative positions being in the order given. It is almost impossible to make out a complete list, because naval shipbuilding is constantly going on, and so much depends upon whether navies which look large and formidable on paper are composed of ships which would rank as of first-class fighting power. Japan has certainly made great strides with her navy since the war with China.

HANOLD.—We should recommend you to wait patiently until things seem more favourable, and if, by the time the young lady is of age, they do not give their consent to the union, and you are in such a position that you can offer her a comfortable home and she is willing to marry you without the consent of her parents, she can do so. If however, you can prevail upon them to take a different view of the matter it would be a far more comfortable and satisfactory arrangement.

DESPAIRING WIFE.—Can your woman's wit and husband's solid judgment not devise a rearrangement of household duties which would leave you a little more at leisure? A housewife's duties are no doubt to a large extent a matter of emergency or accident; she must be prepared to do just what happens to be required at any time, and adapt herself to circumstances; but it is utter ruination of the nervous system to leave everything to arrange itself. We should say an hour's quiet deliberation would enable you to map out a whole week's course, with day and hour for each item in it. If you think out your course on these lines, we believe you will find that the true remedy for your affliction lies within your power to effect.

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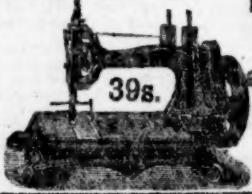
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